

Parent Attitudes about and Involvement with Foreign Language  
Programs for Elementary Students

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## ABSTRACT

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### Parent Attitudes about and Involvement with Foreign Language Programs For Elementary Students

Under the direction of Dr. Audrey Heining-Boynton

The purpose of this study was to investigate parent attitudes about and involvement with their children's elementary foreign language programs. The FLES (foreign language in the elementary school) Program Evaluation Inventory for Parents was used to collect self-reported data from parents. Participants responded to attitude and involvement items using the Likert scale. Data concerning involvement with foreign language(s) and demographic information were collected at the end of the instrument.

Parents with kindergarten through fifth grade children enrolled in Wake County, North Carolina public schools with foreign language in the elementary school (FLES) programs were included in the study. Of the 93 schools in the county school system, 41 were identified as meeting the FLES criteria. From each of these schools fifteen parents were randomly selected for a total of 615 participants. Of the selected participants, 145 responded to the survey.

Frequencies of responses were computed to define percentage of responses to each item. Independent samples t-tests and ANOVA were used to analyze the effects of the independent variables including parent gender, race/ethnicity, educational attainment, income level, and year of study on the dependent variables of parent attitude and parent involvement. Frequencies showed most parents agreed with attitude and involvement statements. Exceptions were items asking about parents receiving information about the foreign language class and the child's use of foreign language at home. Significant effects of educational background on involvement items were found with independent samples t-test analyses. ANOVA and Tukey's post hoc testing analyses also showed significant effects of time and the child's use of foreign language at home.

To Bob, my loving husband, who supported  
and encouraged me throughout this entire endeavor.

And,

to my son Phillip, daughter-in-law Melissa, and grandson Jason,  
and to daughters Emily and Chelsey,  
my beautiful and wonderful children, who always brightened my spirits.

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# **PARENT ATTITUDES ABOUT AND INVOLVEMENT WITH FOREIGN LANGUAGE PROGRAMS FOR ELEMENTARY STUDENTS**

## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

The widespread rise in immigrants to the United States over the past fifteen to twenty years was chronicled in various media reports, and further evidenced by increasing examples of provisions of services and information in multi-lingual modes. Concurrently North Carolina had experienced an influx of newcomers from other states and from other countries, resulting in an increase of communication services for non-English speakers. English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) was available to many public school children, offering the potential for these students to become bilingual. At the same time many foreign language programs were discontinued to make room for other curricular concerns in North Carolina and in the targeted school system. The limited availability of foreign language study for students whose primary language is English suggested a need for renewed information about parent attitudes and involvement in North Carolina toward foreign language and specifically toward elementary school foreign language education for English speakers.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to add to the body of knowledge regarding parents' attitudes and involvement, presently and over time, toward the learning of a foreign language by children, specifically those parents who had children in elementary schools with FLES (foreign language in the elementary school).

## **Introduction to the Problem**

In 1985 the state legislature of North Carolina enacted the Basic Education Program (BEP) to establish and fund comprehensive curricular services for all kindergarten through twelfth grade public school students (Ward, 2001b). Included in the mandated curriculum was the study of a foreign language by kindergarten through fifth grade students. The Department of Public Instruction in North Carolina (NCDPI) recommended the foreign language in the elementary school (FLES) model of delivery (Heining-Boynton, 1991). The BEP was implemented during the late 1980's and early 1990's, but concerns about effective methods of accountability for aspects of the program, and a general economic recession in North Carolina, resulted in an eventual lack of funding for continuing the BEP reform program (Ward, 2001a).

Foreign language instruction in elementary school has been justified by educators and experts with theoretical and empirical rationale. Research suggests early onset and sustained study of second and third languages lead to more effective conversational proficiency (McGroarty, 1997), advantageous to those students whose future educational and professional goals may necessitate bi- or multi-lingual skills. School districts with sporadic implementation of existing foreign language curricula and second language

learning for English speaking students may have overlooked the research, or opted to respond to strong national and local pressures to specifically improve reading and mathematics achievement.

NCDPI and local school systems established policies to grant permission to schools interested in providing alternative programs to foreign language courses, such as science enrichment programs or computer technology instruction. Substitutions were permitted when a school demonstrated that the change occurred only when the existing foreign language teacher left voluntarily, creating an open teaching position. This allowed school personnel to design contemporary programs to address the immediate priorities of the served population.

During the 2006-2007 school year, 41 of 93 elementary schools in one central North Carolina county school system included foreign language instruction as a regular part of the curriculum. Traditional, year-round and magnet programs were represented in this subgroup of the county schools. Less than one-half of the elementary aged students within the school system attended these 41 schools (Wake County Public School System, 2006). The remainder of the students in the public schools within this county received no school based instruction in any foreign language at the same time that many of their classmates and peers were provided with ESL services.

The traditional and year-round elementary schools in this county that had FLES generally provided students with a weekly 30-45 minute class. Magnet elementary schools within the system offered a variety of FLES programs. Included were Spanish language focus programs, weekly foreign language classes, and enrollment in Spanish, French, and German elective courses (Wake County Public School System, 2006). These

classes were designed to offer open enrollment to all students regardless of their primary spoken language. Students not enrolled in the designated schools had no options other than to seek second language class outside of the county schools.

North Carolina, meanwhile, had become increasingly multilingual and multicultural. The non-English speaking population in central North Carolina rose steadily and dramatically over the previous fifteen to twenty years, particularly among the Latino population. This rise was substantiated by the North Carolina State Demographics (2000) data stating that from 1990 to 2000 the North Carolina Hispanic population grew 393.9%. Among the centrally located counties of the state, Durham experienced an Hispanic growth of 729.6%, Harnett 360.4%, Johnston 648.0%, Orange 312.3%, Vance 622.1%, and Wake 529.8%. This trend in diverse population and multilingual growth was a continuation of the diversity of cultures and the rich history of languages present since the establishment of the colonies that evolved into the United States.

English as a Second Language (ESL) and immersion programs for non-English speaking students were created and provided to enable those students to participate more fully in classroom learning activities. North Carolina was an English-Only state (Nguyen, 2007, Zimmerman, 2007); meaning students who are speakers of other languages were required to become proficient in English conversation, literacy and all basic academic coursework. The requirement that second language speakers had to master English may or may not have influenced on the attitudes of English speaking parents concerning the advantages, or disadvantages of their own children learning a foreign language.



While North Carolina schools worked to meet the curricular needs of ESL students, the enactments of Goals 2000 (U.S. Government, 1994) and No Child Left Behind (U.S. Government, 2002) each caused reading and mathematics to become priority curricular areas in North Carolina, resulting in time and monies being diverted from FLES into what was commonly referred to as the basics. Reading and mathematics were tested yearly statewide, beginning in grade three and continuing into high school using State written end-of-grade (or high school end-of-course) instruments. Statewide assessment of writing proficiency was administered in fourth, eighth and tenth grades. Results of statewide testing were reported to federal and state government agencies and to the local public. Statewide testing in science was scheduled to begin for fifth graders in the spring of 2008. Instructional money, time, and energy were, therefore, increased and emphasized for that discipline as had been the case for reading and mathematics.

Non-standardized assessments of a particular subject area generally directed attention away from the value of that subject in the overall learning program. Decreased foreign language instruction and achievement seemed to suffer from this tendency. This possible consequence of test-driven priorities did not correspond with the recognition by many institutions of higher learning, governmental services, retail businesses, and the banking industry of the need to offer services at least bilingually. English-only speakers interacted with limited English speakers increasingly during social and business transactions. Health care and driving information were made available in at least one other language in addition to English. These realities suggested a need to examine the attitudes parents held concerning the need for foreign language learning, specifically at the elementary school level.

### *History of Languages in the United States*

The history of languages spoken in the United States since pre-colonial times has been rich and continuing (Watzke, 2003). The late 20<sup>th</sup> century and early 21<sup>st</sup> century globalizing effects of the Internet and international travel provided immediate and constant opportunities for multicultural and multilingual interaction (Tinsley & Parker, 2006). The cognitive and social benefits of second language learning for all students have been explored and documented by social scientists. Even as the research in these topics was reported many schools loosened requirements for English speaking students to study foreign language. The more dedicated focus on English-only suggested a disassociation between the advantages of multilingualism for English speakers within the changing state of socio-cultural realities and political imperatives mandating English-only services. A study of the knowledge and attitudes parents held about the value and benefits of bilingualism for all children, as demonstrated by their interest in and comments about elementary foreign language classes in American schools, posed a useful topic for discussion generating suggestions for the direction for FLES programs.

The United States has a tradition of being both tolerant and intolerant of languages other than English (Daniels, 1990), a legacy passed down and continued by the United Kingdom as it endeavored to establish domain worldwide. Public and governmental interests in raising social standards and contributing to rapidly evolving technical innovations during the industrial age of the 1800's led many schools in the United States to require classical and modern language study in their curricula. In 1957 America's mission to maintain and improve its perceived status as a world super power was thought to be seriously endangered with the Soviet Union's launching of the space

satellite Sputnik. The Soviet Union's early victory in the space exploration race resulted in the 1958 National Defense Education Act (Association of American Universities, 2006) to designate funding for the assessment and reform of mathematics and science education in the United States. This refocus did not diminish requirements of students to study foreign language and basic academic disciplines, but instead shifted the national attitude about educational priorities to highlight the sciences.

The United States had recognized for a number of years the existence of a shortage of Americans qualified for positions requiring bilingual skills (Ruiz, 1998; Wiegand, 1997; May, 2005). The State Department, diplomatic offices, and agencies responsible for negotiating national security were at a measurable disadvantage when they were unable to converse with or translate for participants from other nations. The American military needed personnel with bilingual skills when encountering situations involving other countries. Law enforcement agencies with a shortage of bilingual staff members were at a disadvantage when investigating cases involving non-English speaking parties.

While America made ongoing reforms in educational expectations and practices, other nations evaluated and upgraded their own systems. Many industrialized nations, and those in the process of becoming more contemporary, required the study of at least one language in addition to the community language. Foreign language courses for children were often actively and aggressively accessed by affluent families (Cummins, 2000) in a number of countries, including America. One reason often cited for exposing American students to foreign languages was primarily to enhance the transcript of professional and college bound students (Crawford, 1992; Walker & Tedick, 2001).

Post-Sputnik discussions and efforts to provide second language education to American students were in line with national goals of supporting ethnic and cultural diversity, and continually seeking to improve educational achievement in the public schools. Similarly, the countries that America recognized as progressive in information and science technology continued to actively promote the study and ongoing assessment of proficiency in English as one of two or three required foreign languages. Research suggested that second language learning enhances cognitive development as patterns are recognized and connections to existing knowledge and experiences are made. Strengthening these cognitive skills could make it easier to learn a third language as well (Harley, 1986). Familiarity with and fluency in both classical and modern foreign languages had long been considered by scholars as necessary foundations for the advanced study of mathematics and the sciences, as much of the historical factual knowledge, conceptual comprehension, and application in these domains are grounded and stored in languages other than English (Watzke, 2003).

Educational research supported the benefits of recognizing parents as partners in education (Sheldon, 2005). Various levels of parental involvement were encouraged by schools, beginning with at-home conversations about school and assistance with homework. In many instances, parents were recruited to volunteer their time by working with small groups of students and attending school events. Parent involvement in the education of their children was shown to result in positive attitudes toward the mission and work of education for parents and for their children (Pape, 1999).

Evidence validated that many American parents wanted their children to study at least one language in addition to English in order to increase their social awareness and

career opportunities when they become adults (Heining-Boynton, 1993). This investigation was conducted to add to the body of knowledge regarding parents' attitudes, presently and over time, toward the learning of a foreign language, specifically those parents who had children in elementary schools with FLES.

### **Research Questions**

Addressing the purpose, these research questions and their associated hypotheses guided the investigation:

1. What are parents' attitudes about and involvement in their children learning foreign languages?
2. Do parents' characteristics affect their attitudes about their children learning foreign languages?
  - H2.1 Gender will affect parents' attitudes about their children learning foreign languages.
  - H2.2 Race and ethnicity will affect parents' attitudes about their children learning foreign languages.
  - H2.3 Educational levels will affect parents' attitudes about their children learning foreign languages.
  - H2.4 Income levels will affect parents' attitudes about their children learning foreign languages.
3. How are parents involved in their child's foreign language learning?
4. Do parents' characteristics affect how they are involved in their children's foreign language learning?

- H4.1 Gender will affect how parents are involved in their children's foreign language learning.
- H4.2 Race and ethnicity will affect how parents are involved in their children's foreign language learning.
- H4.3 Educational levels will affect how parents are involved in their children's foreign language learning.
- H4.4 Income levels will affect how parents are involved in their children's foreign language learning.
- 5. Have parents' attitudes and involvement changed from those reported in 1993 and 2002 surveys?
- H5 There will be no difference between attitudes reported in 1993 and 2002 and those reported for the current study.

### **Definitions of Terms**

Terms essential to this study were acknowledged to hold different meanings in various contexts and by various readers. Attitude, belief, and perception were sometimes used interchangeably. The following definitions were provided to reduce misinterpretations.

1. Foreign language: any and all languages other than American varieties of Standard English.
2. Attitude: manner of feeling or position in regards to a person, object, or idea (Dictionary.com, 2007)
3. Belief: an opinion or conviction (American Heritage Dictionary of the English

Language, 2007)

4. Perception: insight, recognition, or understanding gained through senses or cognition (Dictionary.com, 2007)

### **Significance of the Study**

The growing population of Latinos as well as other nationalities in North Carolina resulted in the creation of English-as-a-Second-Language programs in schools and the establishment of community laws, policies and services to improve communication with non-English speakers (McGroarty, 1997). Wiegand (1997) described the need for English-speaking Americans to also learn second languages for business, entertainment, and educational purposes, while Corson (2001) observed that foreign language learning led to international and intercultural understanding.

Many progressive nations were training students in multiple languages, including English. It was proposed that limited numbers of American English speakers learning a second language left the United States courting disadvantage in negotiating with an increasingly international community. An examination of the attitudes and involvement of central North Carolina parents concerning accepting, knowing, and using languages other than English provided insight into foundations of curricular decisions concerning academic programs, including foreign language instruction.

This study chronicled attitudes of central North Carolina parents toward FLES over a fourteen year period. It spanned the era of Goals 2000 and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002, driving forces in educational curriculum, assessment, and accountability. The possibility existed that Americans saw no real need to become

bilingual since so many other nations promote the learning of English (Kachru, 1997). Focusing on the attitudes and involvement of one population of parents served to open an additional line of dialogue about language learning and encourage continued scholarly scrutiny of beneficial learning programs for contemporary students.

### **Assumptions and Limitations**

A primary assumption in this study was that the participants would respond reflectively and earnestly. Research has indicated that those who respond to surveys tend to choose the answers they think the researcher expects, or those they believe are more politically correct. The language of the items often exacerbates this tendency.

However, it was also shown that anonymity provides responders with more security in answering honestly than offered in face to face conversations (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). Convenient length and reader-friendly items on the survey instrument for this study served to mediate this limitation. The inclusion of a section for open-ended opinion statements provided the respondents with an opportunity to elaborate on issues raised by the items in the questionnaire.

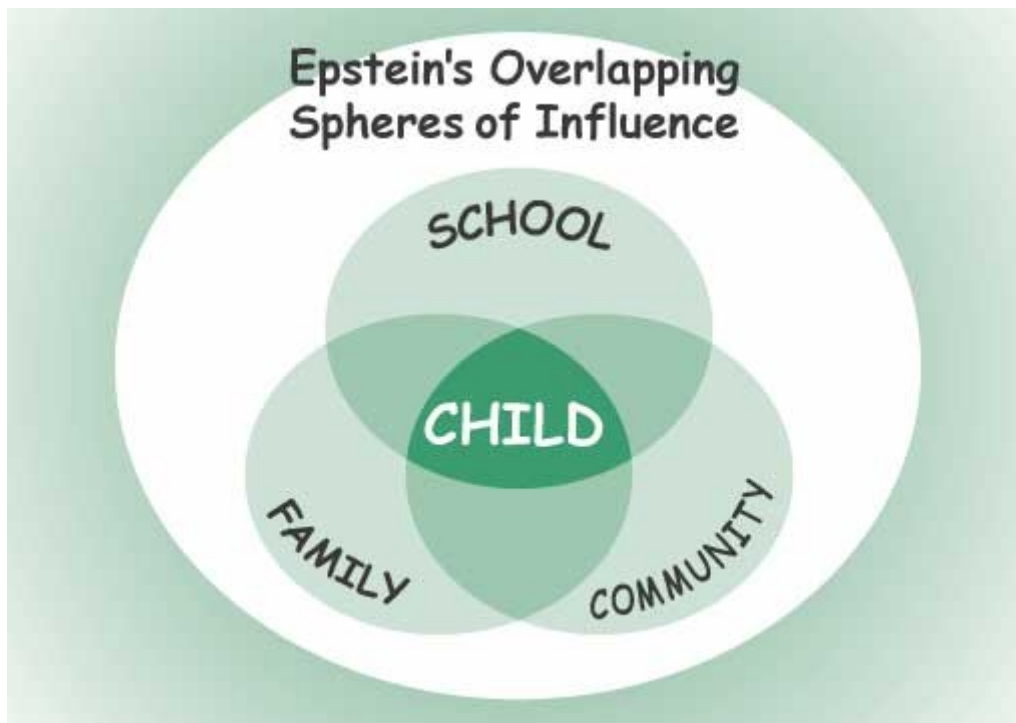
A second assumption was that all parents who received the survey would be inclined to respond (Dillman, 2000). This was the expectation of the researcher in light of standard encouragement by teachers and the general media for parents to become partners in their children's education. However, it was also recognized that parents who demonstrated their involvement in a number of other ways may not afford a survey the same priority as more visible methods of participation.



This assumption suggested another possible limitation. A recognized phenomenon of survey research occurs when those who care passionately about the topic are more likely to respond than those less interested. This effect may result in response bias, making generalizability to the population being observed very difficult (Creswell, 2005). Again, the length and language of the instrument and the provision of the self-addressed stamped envelope were expected to encourage representative participation from parents with varying levels of interest in the topic.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence (Epstein, 1987; Naperville Community Unit School District, 2005) provided the theoretical framework for this study. The spheres of influence overlap to illustrate the ideal collaboration needed to promote educational success for the child. Each sphere represents a strong domain discussed in the literature as underpinning the importance of the attitudes and beliefs a parent and community hold concerning the purposes and needs for learning a second language, with historical background and traditions informing and shaping these attitudes.



Naperville Community Unit School District 203

Naperville, Illinois

<http://www.naperville203.org/parents-students/EpsteinModelPS.asp?print=y>

The school sphere is charged with the formal education of the child. The community overlaps with the school, as the school is situated within the community and operates to meet the goals and needs of that group. Parents bestow substantial influence as members of the community and first teachers of the child, and should remain actively involved in the child's life throughout the school years.

Epstein's model graphically portrays the psychological and sociological nature of partnership embedded in the overlaps. As explained by Bandura (2000), people develop and act within social contexts. Therefore parent attitudes are dependent on their experiences, interactions and collaborations with the community and with the school (Bem, 1970). The Overlapping Spheres of Influence theory informed this investigation of

the importance of identifying and analyzing the attitudes and involvement parents have relating to foreign language education in the elementary school.

The intent of Epstein's theory was not to determine the sequential impact of each of the spheres, though a logical approach for this investigation was to begin with parents. The literature reviewed for this study briefly provided a history of languages and foreign language education in the United States. The review then outlined major understandings of the psychological and social development of attitudes, beliefs and perceptions of individuals and communities. Parents have routinely been advised and encouraged to become involved with their children's education (Sheldon, 2002). This study acknowledged the interests parents have about their children's schooling (Gardner, 1985), while it also served to inform the scholarly understanding of parents' attitudes and involvement specifically concerning FLES.

## **Chapter II**

### **Literature Review**

This chapter provides an overview of the literature that supported the purpose of the study, which was to add to the body of knowledge regarding parents' attitudes and involvement, presently and over time, toward the learning of a foreign language by children, specifically those parents who had children in elementary schools with FLES. It begins with a brief view of the history of languages and foreign language education in the United States, followed by research on attitudes, beliefs and perceptions. Also reviewed were literature and studies regarding parents' attitudes toward their children's schooling, and concerning their children learning foreign language(s) in kindergarten through fifth grade.

#### **Brief History of Languages in the United States and Foreign Language Programs**

Language diversity has been in flux in the United States since the Northwestern Europeans began to arrive and explore North America in the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Jenkins, 2000). Molesky (1988) has described the evolution of American language from its beginnings of

over 1,000 languages and dialects of peoples indigenous to North and South America. As early newcomers began interacting with the Native peoples, communication and language skills were reciprocally introduced to accommodate trade and social relations.

The United States has since continually experienced a steady wave of immigrants from all over the world. According to the 1980 United States Census report (Waggoner, 1988), the highest numbers of recent immigrants came from Asia and the Pacific Islands, followed by immigrants from Spanish speaking countries, supporting the continuous introduction of multilingual and multicultural opportunities into America. With this wealth of resource and opportunity to study and interact with a second language, foreign language had been reported since the 1950's to be studied in the United States primarily by students with aspirations to attend college (Crawford, 1992), and did so with unspecified school or personal expectations for basic proficiency (Walker & Tedick, 2001).

Goals 2000, signed into law by President Clinton, required that the percentage of students proficient in at least two languages would increase, though proficient remained relatively undefined. The Goals also obligated students to become knowledgeable about their own heritage amid the cultural diversity of America and of the world (U. S. Government, 1994). More recently, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act was signed into law in 2002 by President Bush to refocus national attention on raising the standards of achievement, with the initial lens on the academic subjects of reading and mathematics for every student.

Public schools have focused direct attention on the improvement of reading and mathematics instruction and assessment to begin addressing the dictates of NCLB.

Foreign language study was identified as a core subject in NCLB (Tonkin, 2004), but has yet to become a priority in North Carolina schools. Data suggest that Americans remain considerably behind many nations in requiring students to become proficient in at least one, and generally two or three, languages beyond their primary language (Christian, Pufahl, & Rhodes, 2004). Neither Goals 2000 nor NCLB appear to have inspired overwhelmingly open discussion or action on the part of parents and educators concerning the role of FLES for their own children.

### **Attitudes, Beliefs and Perceptions as Theory**

Substantial research has been conducted to examine and explain the development of human attitudes, beliefs and perceptions. These terms can be defined as follows:

- attitude- “position or posture of the body appropriate to or expressive of an action, emotion, etc.” (Dictionary.com, 2007)
- belief- “ mental acceptance of and conviction in the truth, actuality, or validity of something” (American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 2007)
- perception- “a single unified awareness derived from sensory processes while a stimulus is present.” (Dictionary.com, 2007)

As constructs the terms are frequently used interchangeably. Teasing out the causal agents resulting in the development of attitudes, beliefs and perceptions was the foci of seminal works of Bartlett, Piaget, Vygotsky, Bem and Bandura. The literature abounds with publications by these psychology and sociology scientists, as well as with continuations and interpretations of their research. The various foci of these bodies of writings highlight the divergence of definitions of attitudes, beliefs and perceptions, but

also demonstrate the close correlation and nearly synonymous relationships among the terms. It is informative to trace the traditions of understanding the development of these singular and collective characteristics in order to understand the questions that were addressed in this study.

Sir Frederic Bartlett remains respected for his important contributions to psychology, particularly in the field of cognitive science. His extensive work focused primarily on memory and schema, encompassing much of the early to mid 1900's (Saito, 2000). Bartlett's characterized of attitude as a feeling or affect about something one is being asked to do or consider. He described it as the element that drives perception and memory, guiding what will be recalled and how it will be remembered based on the feeling(s) an incident invokes. In Bartlett's construction, attitude was determined by one's own schemata and temperament, and therefore was inexorably entwined with cognitive development and experience with the environment (Larsen & Berntsen, 2000).

During the same era in the science of psychology, Piaget developed a chronicle of human development based on longitudinal observations of his own children which has had a powerful effect on educators' knowledge about cognitive development. Each of his children was clinically observed advancing through what he termed the sensorimotor, preoccupation, symbolic, intuitive, concrete, and operational periods. These stages of development outlined the cognitive and social development of each infant through young adulthood. Piaget noted the interplay between an individual's concrete experiences of manipulating both objects and the reactions of others in the environment as he described each stage. From repeated manipulations the individual becomes more aware of self, others, and the impact of the decisions and actions of each person in a situation

(Malerstein & Ahern, 1979). At the occupational stage young adults make increasingly more focused decisions as they recognize the power of their own influence in their own accomplishments and in those of the group.

A key observation linking the works of Piaget to his contemporary, Bartlett, is the necessary role of the environment in the development of perception and cognition and in the concurrent evolving of beliefs and attitudes. Both scientists recognized that the human being develops cognates and attitudes founded on experiences with objects and other people. At the same time, they each noted that the individual has an impact on the environment and other people by the attitudes and choices he makes (Brewer, 2000).

Vygotsky (Kravtsova, 2006) elaborated further on the works of Bartlett (Larsen & Berntsen, 2000; Saito, 2000) and Piaget (Malerstein & Ahern, 1979) in studying the consciousness and self-awareness features of mental development. Vygotsky's theory of social development highlights the critical role of communication in the individual's early and continued growth as a person and as a member of the group. More specifically Vygotsky identified the importance of an adult naming an activity or behavior as a major determinant in the child's development. An example provided by Kravtsova is where a child may be engaged in playfully banging a toy against a table to hear the noise and feel the vibrations, until the mother points out to the child that he is hammering in nails just like Daddy.

The child initially may simply have been interacting concretely with objects, but with Mother's communication now had a newly constructed association with the activity. Hence the importance of social interchange on mental and cognitive development is illustrated. Building on Bartlett's work, this new construction of meaning is paramount in



the child's development of associating a pleasant attitude with desired interactions with his mother and father.

As observed by Piaget, social development theory recognizes the advancement of development from initial experiential activity to self-awareness to awareness of others. Piaget focused on the person's developmental experiences as he catalogued the stages of human maturation (Malerstein & Ahern, 1979). Vygotsky redirected theories of development by concentrating on the social aspects of human development and those between a child and adults in particular (Kravtsova, 2006). Piaget and Vygotsky each provided important and reasonably compatible insights into human mental and cognitive development guided by continually evolving attitudes, beliefs and perceptions.

Bem (1970) presented attitudes, beliefs and perceptions as constructs generated through a person's physical, emotional, cognitive and social growth throughout life. As the individual has contact and experience with objects and other people, beliefs are concerning the consistency of similar situations and generalizing expectations to similar episodes become internalized. As this transference of expectations becomes validated or negated, the individual forms attitudes such as trust, distrust, and curiosity.

In this interpretation of the foundations of attitudes and beliefs, perceptions play a key role. Perception in this sense refers to use of external cues to define or describe both concrete and abstract phenomena (Bem, 1970). For instance, noting the brightness at the end of towering metal poles localized in one central area may be perceived as the indication of a sporting event in a local arena. Similarly, pale skin coloration combined arms hugging one's abdominal area may cause one observer to perceive the existence of a

stomach ailment in the other. Reactions to perceptions call upon evolved attitudes and beliefs which in turn are the results of prior experiences with similar situations.

Bandura's social cognitive theory offers more direct explanations of each person's place in society and how a person develops recognition of that place. Building on the increasing data from research on brain development, Bandura asserted that human engagement with the environment plays a key role in brain activity and therefore in brain development (Bandura, 2001). In effect, brain development and social cognitive development affect each other mutually. It is through social cognition developed via interaction with people and objects in the environment that brain activity increases and attitudes and beliefs are fostered.

Bandura channeled the works of Bartlett (Larsen & Berntsen, 2000; Saito, 2000), Piaget (Malerstein & Ahern, 1979), Vygotsky (Kravtsova, 2006), Bem (1970), and other researchers into a study of the role of the individual in human agency. Intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness are the crucial actions undertaken by an individual exploring personal agency. Beliefs of personal agency direct a person's aspirations and goal setting, expectations of outcomes, and perceived social barriers and enhancements (Bandura, 2000). Individuals test personal efficacy by trying to determine what is expected of them, what they expect from others, and choosing actions to please others or to achieve self-approval (Bandura, 2001). Social environments and pressures are integral agents in personal agency development because humans, with the exception of the reclusive, do not live in isolation. Individuals respond to social stimuli, thereby having a reciprocal effect on their environment. As individuals experience acceptance of

or resistance to their actions and values they begin to form and express attitudes about what they consider important for themselves and others.

The social aspect of Bandura's theory incorporates three modes of human agency: personal, proxy, and collective (Bandura, 2002). As noted above, personal efficacy refers to the perceptions one has over one's own power to produce chosen results. In the proxy mode of agency, a person endeavors to prevail upon others in positions of authority, acclaim, or expertise to act on his behalf to achieve desired outcomes (Bandura, 2000). Collective efficacy is described as the power to reach goals developed from shared beliefs and perceptions through interactive and collaborative actions (Bandura, 2002). Proxy and collective agency theory exemplifies the relationship between attitudes, beliefs and perceptions, and the choices one makes to express and act on them (Bem, 1970).

### **Parent Attitudes, Beliefs, and Perceptions toward Schools and Schooling**

The work and reports of Bartlett, Piaget, Vygotsky, Bem and Bandura have provided insight into the origins and development of parent attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions about becoming involved in the education of their children. The direct correlation between parental attitude and involvement in various capacities of schooling and student achievement has been documented in many empirical investigations. Joyce Epstein has developed the Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence to explain and further examine the relationships of the involved agents (Epstein, 1987). This model is the theoretical underpinning for this study and is grounded in the overlapping aims of the school, the community, and the parents as they affect the child's education. Parent networking can provide a substantial support system for positively impacting student

performance by supporting and critically questioning policies and expectations of the schools (Sheldon, 2002). Such focused networking often leads to forming collaborative relationships and support in achieving educational and social goals and activities within the community as well.

Evidence of the power of networking among parents and their beliefs in their own self efficacy to be competent in active involvement in the support of their children's schooling has been collected by Sheldon (2002). This study investigated the relationships between parent involvement with school matters and their beliefs about the school inviting their participation. It connected these relationships to the strengths of social and community networking, finding that such networking tends to provide predictors as to if and how parents will perceive and act on the invitation to partner with the school for their children's success.

Many other studies concerning parents' actual and perceived access to becoming involved in education have been conducted. One such investigation concerned the active involvement of middle and higher income parents through the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) and classroom volunteering in an urban school (Kroeger, 2005). The parents involved did not mirror the overall population of the school, yet gave of their time and resources to all children and with good intentions for each. They believed they had the personal and collective efficacy to support the achievement of all students in their children's school. The parent-school partnership undertaken by these families provided evidence of their positive attitudes toward the school, leading to their roles in the success of the students. Noticeably absent, however, from the parent support group were those from lower income brackets, English as a Second Language, non-English speaking

parents, and parents of minority ethnicities. While the findings of this study were encouraging, this limitation existed and was noted by Kroeger.

Kroeger's research reaffirmed the value of parent involvement, but indicated there may be some disparity among subgroups of parents in their attitudes toward their own abilities and school receptivity to their becoming part of a support group. The system the urban school established did not permit working parents to volunteer in classrooms, as time availabilities conflicted with job schedules. The PTO focus on fundraising appeared to exclude or intimidate families struggling with limited income. The result was a scene that seemed to perpetuate the perception of the power of the affluent and mostly White parents to influence school decisions and activities. Further investigation into the actual attitudes of less visibly involved parents could shed light on their perceptions of their ability and authority to assist their children in school success.

An exemplar of a school-community-family collaboration was implemented in Virginia to provide support and successful achievement for a population of special needs students (Cohen, Linker, & Stutts, 2006). This model provided evidence that professional learning communities, as envisioned by DuFour (2004) can result in positive attitudes by parents about their personal and collective efficacy to the benefit of all students. In this model all participants were trained to work collaboratively with data to provide instructional support appropriate for individual students.

Students in this setting benefited by receiving direct support from their parents; and by recognizing that their parents valued education by giving of their time and energy. The school benefited by gaining access to an invested pool of collaborators willing to share their time, knowledge, and beliefs about the accomplishments all children can

achieve. The community benefited as school services, student achievements and valuable parent expertise became vital pathways of social engagement (Cohen et al, 2006). Again, their willingness to enter into a partnership with the school highlights positive parental attitudes of competency when invited to participate in school decisions and programs.

Experiences of non-English speaking parents with American schools provide another example of proactive parent attitudes and perceptions about their influence in their children's schooling. Lahman and Park (2004) conducted qualitative research into the communication difficulties encountered by teachers in the United States and non-English speaking Chinese and Korean parents. They found that these parents wanted their children to learn English and to develop necessary social skills to be able to interact with their American peers. The parents did not retreat from conferencing with English-speaking teachers and insisting on school attention to the lingual and academic needs of their children. The small sample size made it difficult to generalize results to the population of all non-English speaking parents. Yet the requests of these parents for the school to actively meet the needs of their children are noteworthy and may prompt questions of similar concern to all parents of school-aged children. The intentness and immersion of these parents in resolving a problem suggest a positive attitude toward individual and collective influence on school decisions and actions.

The Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence clearly portrays the importance of family alongside the community and the schools. Parent attitudes and perceptions of their roles in schools can be mediated by schools earnestly planning six types of involvement for parents. These include: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community (Epstein & Sanders,

2006). Models based on Epstein's theory are designed to account for the resources parents believe they can offer, and to provide scaffolded opportunities in which all parents can realize increased efficacy in school-community-parent partnerships (Deslandes, 2001).

Parent involvement in schools has been strongly endorsed in the United States and has become a standard expectation by parents, teachers and students (Sheldon, 2002). Involvement may take many forms; including becoming active in initiating and implementing school improvement programs (Brandt, 1989). Epstein's theory notes that parents also enhance their children's learning by engaging in discussions with them about what they are learning. Parents who ask questions about the most recent foreign language lesson, who assist with or check language homework, and make attempts to learn the language with the child are displaying positive attitudes about the importance of this aspect of school (Cooper & Maloof, 1999).

### **Parent Attitudes, Beliefs, and Perceptions toward Language Learning**

Parents may communicate their attitudes to their children actively or passively (Bartram, 2006). Actively, parents display positive perceptions about language learning by taking an interest in the work and achievement of their child in FLES activities. Parents may also actively display a negative attitude that language learning is unnecessary. This may be expressed by encouraging their child to spend more time in other disciplines or by belittling the second language or its speakers. Showing no interest in another language or making no attempt to learn another language can send passive negative messages about the importance of knowing a second language.

Visible expressions of the attitudes parents hold about language learning are shared when parents attend multicultural events, describe those who speak other languages with praise and admiration, and enjoy being in their company. Parents with positive attitudes toward second languages display an integrative orientation and a desire for association with other-language speakers (Gardner, 1985). On the other hand, parents model their negative attitudes by showing little interest in the second language or in the attempts by their child to learn another language. Attitudes held by parents may be influenced by their own knowledge or lack thereof of another language (Bartram, 2006).

Observations have been made of parents demonstrating incongruent attitudes and actions. This is the case when parents encourage the child to work hard to learn a second language but at the same time question the child's ability to actually learn another language. Parents may question the value of bilingualism, and make disparaging comments of the other-language community at the same time as the child is engaging in learning colors or numbers in a second language (Gardner, Masgoret, & Tremblay, 1999). In the fall of 2005 a National Organic Poll (NOP) survey determined that 90% of American adults believe children should learn a second language. It also found that while respondents claimed to value second language learning, they maintained negative beliefs such as students' inability to even learn English well, that students will not learn enough to be beneficial, and that everyone else speaks English anyway (Tinsley & Parker, 2006).

### **Research Questions 1 and 2, and Associated Hypotheses**

This literature prompted two research questions about parents' attitudes toward children learning foreign language.



1. What are parents' attitudes about and involvement in their children learning foreign languages?

The first research question was drawn from the complexity of beliefs and perceptions demonstrated by parents who may verbally support their children's efforts to study another language while not otherwise communicating an attitude of the importance of the skill. The responses to this question provided basic descriptive data about these attitudes.

2. Do parents' characteristics affect their attitudes about their children learning foreign languages?

This question will explore specifically discernible relationships between attitudes and involvement and parents' characteristics. As studied and described by Bartlett, Piaget, Vygotsky, Bem and Bandura attitudes are developed based on individual social and physical experiences with the environment. Therefore, the following hypotheses are projected for this question.

- H2.1 Gender will affect parents' attitudes about their children learning foreign languages.

Watzke (2003) wrote that in colonial America foreign language education was considered a vehicle for gaining access to medical and legal schools, professions open only to men at that time. The United States government, business industry, and health service providers are recognizing a need for improved bilingual skills (Ruiz, 1998; Wiegand, 1997; May, 2005). While women are gaining access to these traditionally male dominated career fields, gender based differences in attitudes about foreign language learning are anticipated.

## H2.2 Race and ethnicity will affect parents' attitudes about their children learning foreign languages.

The Chinese and Korean parents observed by Lahman and Park (2004) highlight the effect racial and/or ethnic experiences may have on the attitudes developed by parents about the need for their children to learning foreign language. The NOP finding that some Americans see no reason to learn a foreign language since the rest of the world is learning English (Tinsley & Parker, 2006) suggests there will be differences based on race and ethnicity.

## H2.3 Educational levels will affect parents' attitudes about their children learning foreign languages.

Foreign language study has traditionally been perceived as strengthening background and new understanding of science, medicine, and mathematics while laborers have a stronger need for vocational skills (Watzke, 2003). Attitudes may be developed based on parents' knowledge or inexperience with second language learning (Bartram, 2006). These and similar experiences indicate that educational levels of parents will have an impact on their attitudes about their children learning foreign languages.

## H2.4 Income levels will affect parents' attitudes about their children learning foreign languages.

The example described by Kroeger (2005) of less affluent parents being less visible in supporting school programs suggests a difference in attitudes toward foreign language learning as well. The perception that low-income laborers do not need foreign language education further supports this expectation (Watzke, 2003).

### **Parent Attitudes, Beliefs, and Perceptions toward FLES**

In Greece many parents have enrolled their elementary aged children in private foreign language programs since the public schools do not mandate second language study until fifth grade (Jacobson, 2005). The St. Lambert experiment conducted in Montreal, Canada was initiated at the request of parents insisting that their English speaking children be taught French beginning in kindergarten. This immersion program was designed so that virtually all instruction was in French until second grade (Met, 1980). These are only two examples out of many underscoring the value that parents in other countries place on foreign language education for young learners.

There are also numerous examples of the interest American parents have shown in having their young children learn a second language. Parents in Holland, Michigan formed a collaborative group to research the opinions of other parents about foreign language study in the elementary school (FLES). They were interested in identifying the benefits for their children of second language learning and in making the necessary provisions for implementation of an after school language program. Their work and dedication led to the creation of a successful and expanded FLES program, illustrating the power of their belief in the value of second language learning in the elementary years and in their ability to impact curricular decisions (Heining-Boynton, 1993).

In another case, a magnet school in a suburb of Indianapolis offered a child-centered approach with a focus on progressive technology and on foreign language study. Parents were eager to have their children enrolled in the school, with a supposition by authorities that one of the main draws was the foreign language program. This assumption was made for various reasons, among them the fact that a number of the

parents formed their own small foreign language study group to learn Chinese on Friday nights (Elliot, 1996).

A third example was noted during a period when non-English speakers in many public elementary schools were being provided various English language, cultural, and social learning support services (Fishman, 1997), English-speaking parents and parents who spoke a language besides English in Phoenix, Arizona demonstrated a distinct interest in foreign language instruction (Cooper & Maloof, 1999) for all students. At that time financial barriers prevented implementation of sustained FLES programs. The parents' strong desire to provide foreign language instruction to the students in the elementary schools prevailed, and parents whose primary languages were not English were recruited and trained to serve as teachers of foreign languages. Parents who were native speakers of Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, and Korean provided language instruction. Their belief in the importance for elementary students to learn the languages and cultures of other countries in order to develop a stronger sense of a global community shows the effectiveness of building on parent attitudes to improve learning opportunities.

### **Research Questions 3 and 4, and Associated Hypotheses**

Parents' attitudes toward children learning foreign language, as displayed through their involvement with their children's learning, was investigated with the following questions.

3. How are parents involved in their children's foreign language learning?

This question provided descriptive data about how parents demonstrate their attitudes about foreign language learning through interactions with their child specifically focused on foreign language learning experiences.

4. Do parents' characteristics affect how they are involved in their children's foreign language learning?

Epstein (1987) developed the theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence featuring the importance of family involvement in the child's school experience. Sheldon (2002) reiterated the value of parent involvement in their children's schooling to provide support and communicate a positive attitude about learning. The following hypotheses were proposed based on observations and studies in the literature:

- H4.1 Gender will affect how parents are involved in their children's foreign language learning.

Parents convey attitudes toward foreign language through integrative activities with the community and involvement with their child's foreign language study (Gardner, 1985). It was suspected that differences by gender in involvement would be found based on the traditional roles of the male and female in parenting (Watzke, 2003).

- H4.2 Race and ethnicity will affect how parents are involved in their children's foreign language learning.

Parents in Greece (Jacobson, 2005) and Canada (Met, 1980) provided two examples of the positive beliefs in foreign language study held by parents with diverse backgrounds. However, the willingness of parents whose primary language was not English to voluntarily provide foreign language in the elementary school (Cooper &

Maloof, 1999) suggested a possible difference in how race and ethnicity affect involvement in children's foreign language learning.

H4.3 Educational levels will affect how parents are involved in their children's foreign language learning.

As further demonstrated by parents of students in an urban school (Kroeger, 2005) and parents of special needs students in Virginia (Cohen, et al, 2006), parents respond positively to invitations to become involved in their children's learning. The Virginia example in particular adds the dimension of knowledge and attitudes of personal efficacy as described by Bandura (2002). It was foreseen that educational levels of parents would impact how involved parents are in their children's foreign language learning based on this literature and enhanced by the report of parents initiating their own language learning class in Indiana (Elliot, 1996).

H4.4 Income levels will affect how parents are involved in their children's foreign language learning.

Referring again to the Kroeger (2005) study, the more affluent parents were the most visibly involved with supporting students during the school day. It was assumed that other parents were not able to be as involved due to work conflicts with the school schedule. When a school system in Phoenix, Arizona lacked funds to implement FLES, parents whose primary languages were Spanish, Chinese, Japanese and Korean provided this instruction themselves (Cooper & Maloof, 1999). The inability of the schools to find the monetary resources, however, suggested that income has a strong influence in assigning value to a particular subject area. It was expected that income levels would

have similar affects on how parents are involved in their children's foreign language learning.

### **Research Question 5, and Associated Hypothesis**

In 1993 and 2002 studies parents' attitudes toward children learning foreign language in the elementary school (FLES) tended to be positive. It was appropriate, then, to replicate those studies to investigate trends over time.

5. Have parents' attitudes and involvement changed from those reported in 1993 and 2002 surveys?

The immigrant population in the United States and central North Carolina had risen dramatically during this time span (North Carolina State Demographics, 2000). Renewed efforts at educational reform by way of the No Child Left Behind Act (U. S. Government, 2002) coupled with world events made this question timely and relevant.

- H5     There will be no difference between attitudes reported in 1993 and 2002 and those reported for the current study.

The United States has a history of acceptance of and resistance to languages other than English (Daniels, 1990). Yet Americans have traditionally viewed the study of other languages as advantageous educationally, professionally, and socially (Heining-Boynton, 1993; Cummins, 2000; Watzke, 2003). This positive attitude toward foreign language study led to the presumption that parents' attitudes about foreign language in the elementary school would be the same as in 1993 and 2002.

## **Summary of the Literature**

Molesky (1988) provided a comprehensive summary of the history of languages in the United States, supported by observations made by Jenkins (2000), Crawford (1992) and Waggoner (1988). These accounts traced the social and experiential contexts of Americans in the development of attitudes about non-English languages and the value placed on studying foreign languages. Language plays a major role in the way people think, the values they develop (Kravtsova, 2006), the traditions and activities in which they participate, and in local and global communication. Parent attitudes toward language learning may be linked to their personal backgrounds and experiences and to their national histories and cultural traditions (Bem, 1970; Walker & Tedick, 2001; Bartram, 2006).

Theories developed by Bartlett, Piaget, Vygotsky, Bem, and Bandura inform psychologists, sociologists and educators about the development of cognition, attitudes, beliefs and perceptions in human beings. Each scientist has provided rationale and evidence associating the development of the individual and of the socio-cultural community as reciprocally dependent.

Bartlett linked memory and recall to attitude and perception by noting that the individual's attitude will affect the way an incident will be approached and recalled (Saito, 2000). Piaget focused on the concrete experiences the individual must encounter to learn first of oneself, then beyond oneself (Malerstein & Ahern, 1979). Vygotsky centered his work on the construction of meaning within the socio-cultural context (Kravtsova, 2006). Bem has described the importance of expectations of knowledge and outcomes based on prior experiences as the basis for forming attitudes and perceptions



about the environment. Bandura (2000) has expanded this description to explain the development of attitudes of personal and collective efficacy as an individual engages in behaviors and relationships.

Gardner added the aspect of integrative motivation to explain how people situate themselves with associates who appear capable of assisting in the achievement of desired results (Gardner, 1985). Bandura supported this explanation of social interaction through the triad of personal, proxy, and collective efficacy human beings pursue as they learn and navigate a path to perceived success and self-satisfaction (Bandura, 2002, 2001, 2000).

The Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence underpins family involvement in schools (Epstein, 1987) and formed the conceptual framework for this research project investigating parent attitudes. Epstein's model illustrates the importance of including parents in educational missions and decisions. Vygotsky and Bem illuminated the effects of socially constructed experiences in the development of an individual's attitudes and perceptions (Kravtsova, 2006; Bem, 1970). Bandura's theories of personal and collective efficacy and Vygotsky's social development theory highlighted possible reasons for tension between the attitudes of authority exhibited by educators and the unstable attitudes and beliefs parents may hold about their effectiveness as partners in their children's education.

History shows that foreign language programs have been an integral part of education in the United States for a variety of reasons (Watzke, 2003). Recent studies provided evidence that many parents desire and actively seek foreign language programs for their elementary school children. Examples have been documented in Greece

(Jacobson, 2005) and Canada (Met, 1980), as well as in the United States (Heining-Boynton, 1993; Elliot, 1996; & Cooper & Maloof, 1999). These cases suggested parents are actively interested in FLES programs for their children.

The United States is facing new demands to meet the linguistic needs of its citizens in a globally and technologically connected present and future. Parent attitudes about and involvement in foreign language programs for students may serve to contribute to conversations and decisions concerning the status of FLES now and in the future.

## **Chapter III**

### **Research Design**

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to add to the body of knowledge regarding parents' attitudes and involvement, presently and over time, toward the learning of a foreign language by children, specifically those parents who had children in elementary schools with FLES (foreign language in the elementary school).

#### **Rationale for Quantitative Inquiry**

Quantitative inquiry was appropriate in this study to provide descriptive data documenting parent attitudes toward and involvement with foreign language education in elementary schools in contemporary North Carolina. The investigation was a replication of research conducted and supervised by Dr. Audrey Heining-Boynton in 1993 and 2002 with the intent of comparing results to data collected in those studies and to discern differences over time (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003). A demographic component was added to allow for a richer description of attitudes.

## **Population and Sample**

The participants for this study were randomly selected parents of kindergarten through fifth grade students enrolled in one of 41 elementary schools that offered at least one foreign language program throughout Wake County, a large school system in central North Carolina (Appendix A). These schools were chosen based on information presented on their 2006-2007 websites indicating that their school had a foreign language program. These 41 schools were a part of a total of 93 elementary schools in the district. However, several of the selected schools had recently dropped their FLES program. These schools remained in the sample to offer their families a chance to share their views based on their experiences with the recently past program.

The setting for the research was a county school system that served urban, suburban and rural families. Job opportunities in the county traditionally and recently included farming, blue-collar craftsmen and apprenticeships, public service and health care careers, computer and telecommunication projects, research positions, and private industry. The state capital is located within the county, providing a model and standard of providing services to a community with a diverse population, high expectations, and continuous technological and educational progress. The county boasts a large state university, along with several smaller private colleges and a community technical college. The surrounding counties are home to major universities and colleges, several less than one hundred miles from virtually any point in the targeted county.

The County School Demographics Department described the 2006-2007 kindergarten through high school population as 0.3% American Indian, 5.0% Asian, 10.2% Hispanic/Latino, 26.8% African American, 53.8% White, and 3.9% Multi-Racial

(WCPSS, 2006). The Free and Reduced Lunch program served 28.2% of the students. These percentages were reasonably representative of the general population of the county as estimated by the U. S. Census Bureau in 2005. That count reported 0.4% American Indian, 4.40% Asian, 7.4% Hispanic or Latino, 20.6% African American, 66.4 % White, and 1.4% Multi-Racial. There were three reasons for choosing this site and these participants: (a) applicability criteria as described by Lincoln and Guba (1990); (b) convenience (Marshall & Rossman, 1999); and (c) funding constraints.

Applicability was established by focusing on parents of students in elementary schools offering a foreign language program, as this is the population of interest. The fact that a few of the selected schools had discontinued their FLES programs during and after the time the schools were selected did not present a fatal problem to the study, as participants from these schools had very recent knowledge of and experience with FLES. The school system's focus on maintaining diversity with magnet schools and through purposeful neighborhood school assignment suggested a basic level of confidence that sampling public school parents would be reasonably reflective of the general population of parents.

Convenience in terms of ease of access to the pool of eligible participants was a determinant for the researcher, as the researcher was a teacher in a non-FLES elementary school in the targeted school system. Time commitment was a consideration for both the researcher and the participants. Confining the study site to local proximity decreased the amount of time required to secure elementary student enrollment lists, and mail turn-around time. The questionnaire (see Appendix C) was designed to require a ten to fifteen minute time commitment from the participants. The opportunity it provided parents to

serve as partners in their children's education was expected to enhance their desire to respond (Sheldon, 2005) and led to an expectation of a reasonably sound number of returns.

The selected site hosted 93 elementary schools with an enrollment of 62,395, (WCPSS, 2006). It was determined at the outset of the study that 41 of these schools included foreign language programs of varying descriptions, and served a population of 28,435 kindergarten through fifth-grade students. Assuming these were not all single child families, the number of available parent participants was assumed to be somewhat fewer. The Tailored Design Method indicates that an initial distribution of 661 surveys with a 30% return would be statistically acceptable for inferring results to the larger population (Dillman, 2000). This study surveyed 615 families, fifteen per school, which was only slightly fewer than the number of contacts recommended. The 1993, which surveyed a larger geographic area of North Carolina, resulted in 180 returns. The 2002 survey resulted in 1458 returns. It was anticipated that the number of responses for this replication would be comparable and statistically sound.

This study was funded primarily by the researcher. Mailed survey research is relatively inexpensive as compared to models such as interviewing (Powell & Connaway, 2004). Educational research funding was not sought as it was not as readily available as in fields such as medicine and transportation (Gall, et al, 2003). The proposed timeframe for conducting the study was six months, which was incompatible with time necessary to seek alternative funding.

The study was also supported financially by Dr. Audrey Heining-Boynton through underwriting postage costs and providing university stationary outer envelopes.

The purpose of the study, to add to the body of knowledge regarding parents' attitudes, presently and over time, toward the learning of a foreign language, specifically those parents who had children in elementary schools with FLES, was timely and informative (Powell & Connaway, 2004) in Dr. Heining-Boynton's field of expertise.

Though the program and demographic profiles of the sample schools may have shifted slightly since the 1993 and 2002 studies, the respondents were randomly chosen from selected schools leading to a reasonable expectation of acceptable results. The expected satisfactory return allowed for an over-time comparison with data previously collected. A variable that possibly negatively impacted return rates was a first-time mandatory conversion to year round school calendars for several of the selected schools to meet rapid school enrollment growth in the county. This event was not expected to result in dramatically fewer responses as many of the schools were already on the year round calendar, and others were magnet schools, reducing the number of parents who possibly had their focus diverted by calendar concerns.

The 15 families from each identified school were randomly selected as participants, for a total of 615 surveys. The list of families generated was evaluated to eliminate the occurrence of families with siblings, and children with parents at different addresses. The Wake County Public Schools Evaluation and Research Department provided the researcher with a list including student names, parent names and family addresses of approximately 30,000 children enrolled in the selected schools' kindergarten through fifth grade enrollment lists. The researcher counted down the list for each school and chose every 50<sup>th</sup> name. Where the list indicated siblings, these entries were counted as one, and the 50 count continued for 15 parent participants from each school.

Levels of parent educational attainments, and socio-economic and race/ethnic indicators for the population served by the county schools were mostly not identifiable by enrollment address lists (Gall, et al, 2003), though sampling from schools throughout this diverse county presumed subset groups would be represented. Cases where surnames suggested Asian, Asian Indian, or Hispanic origins were not excluded or given special consideration in the sampling count.

Only schools that currently offered some form of FLES, or did so in the recent past, were included in the cluster sampling. Parents from schools whose 2006-2007 websites indicated their school did not participate in a FLES program were excluded due to the language of the items on the questionnaire. This population of parents could be chosen as subjects of future research (Creswell, 2005).

Trust in the validity of the study, and a sense of the importance of their responses on the survey, were integral to the participants, and to the success of the study. A summary of the findings was offered upon request to interested participants (Creswell, 2005) to instill both. In addition to strengthening the bridge of trust, providing said summary was anticipated to initiate parent networking panels focused on discussing common concerns and solutions for FLES (Sheldon, 2002).

## **Procedures**

After securing approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), permission and assistance were obtained from the Assistant Superintendent of Evaluation and Research (E&R) of the targeted school system through the established process of applying to conduct a study. Support and recommendations were sought from the school



system's E&R and from the Second Languages Department of Curriculum and Instruction to collect family names and addresses from selected schools. The E&R department provided the enrollment lists directly to the researcher. This support was considered important in the event that a follow-up distribution was indicated due to first time low response. It has been recognized that mailed paper surveys result in unpredictable and often low returns (Gall, et al, 2003).

After mailing 615 surveys, 147 were returned. One of these had only comments supplied, and one other had no responses. Therefore, the analyzed data set was 145 of the original 615 mailings, for a 23.5% return. A total of 27, or 4.4% were returned to the researcher as undeliverable. The introduction of bias had to be considered since less than a fourth of the sample responded. However, by mailing the surveys in university return-addressed envelopes with a cover letter, survey instrument, and self-addressed stamped envelope the researcher determined the return was acceptable. Limited funding was also a barrier to second mailings.

A cover letter explaining the study (Appendix B) and the FLES Program Evaluation Inventory (FPEI) (Appendix C), along with a self-addressed stamped envelope were mailed in university return-addressed envelopes to participants using addresses provided by E&R. Parents were directed to return the completed survey within seven (7) days of receiving it.

Surveys were coded using a three-digit number already assigned the school by the school system, followed by numbers one through fifteen as determined by the count of 50. A database was created to identify the coded numbers assigned to families. This step was used to identify the elementary schools attended by respondents' children, and for

purposes of identifying participants who might require a second reminder mailing, should that step become warranted (Dillman, 2000). It was also used to identify mailings returned as undeliverable, to analyze for possible causes the survey did not reach the intended participant.

### **Instrument**

Data were collected on the FLES Program Evaluation Inventory (FPEI), (Appendix C), an instrument originally designed and distributed by Dr. Audrey Heining-Boynton (1993). There were five forms of the original instrument to target particular groups with direct association with FLES programs: students, classroom teachers, FLES teachers, school administrators and parents. Only the parent form was administered in this investigation. The questionnaire contained two different types of questions: those specifically asking about the child's experiences with foreign language lessons at school, and those more focused on parent attitudes about foreign language learning and FLES. Parents indicated their responses on an ordinal 5-point Likert scale. The FPEI was modified with the permission of Dr. Heining-Boynton to include demographic descriptors of the respondents. Two questions were added asking if children receive foreign language instruction outside of school, and if the responding parent spoke a language other than English.

#### *Parents' Attitudes about Their Children Learning Foreign Languages*

The following eight questionnaire items, as "My child..." statements, were determined to be about attitude:

1. My child talks at home about foreign language class.
2. My child's comments are positive about foreign language learning.

3. My child feels successful in the foreign language class.
4. My child likes the foreign language.
5. My child likes the foreign language teacher.
9. My child brings home foreign language worksheets, song handouts, or information.
10. My child uses foreign language at home.
13. **Answer this question only if your child is having academic difficulties and is at risk of failing or is learning disabled.**

My child is benefiting from the elementary foreign language program at our elementary school.

*Parents' Involvement with Their Children Learning Foreign Languages*

These five questionnaire items, as "I..." statements, were determined to be about involvement:

6. I am receiving enough information about the foreign language program at our elementary school.
7. I have seen my child performing in a foreign language school program.
8. I have visited my child's foreign language classroom.
11. I am in favor of teaching a foreign language to children.
12. I feel that studying foreign language has not jeopardized my child's progress in other subject areas, such as math or reading.

### **Instrument Reliability and Validity**

Previous replications of the initial study provided evidence for the reliability of the instrument. Inter-item reliability was strong as determined using Cronbach's alpha with .05 set as acceptable. After evaluating the entire instrument, alpha was 0.86 (N=1278). When adjusting for the portion of the sample responding only to items 1-12 the alpha was 0.94 (N=169). This adjustment was a result of questionnaire directions to respondents to answer item 13 only if "your child is having academic difficulties and is at risk of failing or is learning disabled."

The FPEI was administered in two previous study sets which served as field tests for the instrument. The original instrument was the result of collaborative designing and piloting by a team of FLES teachers, administrators, and consultants. Designers evaluated face validity by determining if the items were clear and addressed the question of attitudes toward FLES. The instrument was further evaluated for construct validity. Creswell (2005) described construct validity as assurance that the questions on the instrument are meaningful and purposeful, and if they are useful and significant. The FPEI survey was found to meet these criteria.

### **Measurement of Variables**

The dependent variables for this study were parents' attitudes about learning foreign language in elementary school, and parents' involvement with their children's foreign language learning.

Responses to all attitudes questions (Items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, 10 and 13) were summed to create an additive index. Before doing so, Cronbach's alpha was computed to

be sure the responses had adequate internal consistency, which would mean an alpha of 0.5 or above. In a parallel way, responses to all involvement questions (Items 6, 7, 8, 11 and 12) were summed to create an additive index and Cronbach's alpha was checked.

To allow comparisons across all three surveys, equivalent additive indices for attitudes and involvement were similarly created for 1993 and 2002.

There were five independent variables in this study. Statistical tests were performed comparing responses by gender, race and ethnicity, educational level, yearly income level, and year of study.

Gender was measured in two categories, female and male.

Race and ethnicity was measured in six categories: American Indian, Asian, Hispanic or Latino, African American, White and Multi-Racial. These were the same categories from which parents chose on Wake County Public Schools student enrollment forms.

Educational level was measured in four categories of credentials: less than high school, high school graduate (including GED or other equivalency, some college or associate degree, and bachelor's degree or higher. These categories were defined using levels which are generally familiar to individuals experienced with filling out forms and completing surveys.

Yearly income level was measured in seven consecutive ranges: less than \$15,000; \$15,000 to \$34,999; \$35,000 to \$49,999; \$50,000 to \$74,999; \$75,000 to \$99,999; \$100,000 to \$149,999; and \$150,000 or more. These categories were determined by modifying the North Carolina State Demographics (2000) income level format, making it easier for respondents to select an answer quickly.

Year of study was measured in three categories and defined as 1993, 2002, and 2007.

### **Data Analysis**

Over a period of six weeks following initial dispersal of questionnaires, those returned were hand entered into the computer and data processed using SPSS. Additional comments by all participants who offered them were also recorded and identified by school and participant code.

The research questions and hypotheses for this study are listed here, followed by the statistical procedures used to address them. An alpha level of .05 was used for all statistical tests.

#### **1. What are parents' attitudes about and involvement in their children learning foreign languages?**

The answer to this question will be presented in a table of the parents' responses to the attitude items (1-5, 9, 10 and 13).

#### **2. Do parents' characteristics affect their attitudes about their children learning**

**foreign languages?**

##### **H2.1 Gender will affect parents' attitudes about their children learning foreign languages.**

To test this hypothesis independent samples t-tests were performed to compare female and male responses.

**H2.2 Race and ethnicity will affect parents' attitudes about their children learning foreign languages.**

This hypothesis was tested by performing ANOVA to compare responses of American Indian, Asian, Hispanic/Latino, African American, White, and Multi-Racial races and ethnicities.

**H2.3 Educational levels will affect parents' attitudes about their children learning foreign languages.**

To test this hypothesis ANOVA were performed to compare the responses of four categories of educational credentials.

**H2.4 Income levels will affect parents' attitudes about their children learning foreign languages.**

This hypothesis was tested by performing ANOVA to compare responses of the yearly income level categories.

**3. How are parents involved in their children's foreign language learning?**

The answer to this question has been presented in a table of the parents' responses to the involvement items (6, 7, 8, 11, and 12).

**4. Do parents' characteristics affect how they are involved in their children's foreign language learning?**

**H4.1 Gender will affect how parents are involved in their children's foreign language learning.**

To test this hypothesis independent samples t-tests were performed to compare female and male responses.

**H4.2 Race and ethnicity will affect how parents are involved in their children's foreign language learning.**

This hypothesis was tested by performing ANOVA to compare responses of American Indian, Asian, Hispanic/Latino, African American, White, and Multi-Racial races and ethnicities.

**H4.3 Educational levels will affect how parents are involved in their children's foreign language learning.**

To test this hypothesis ANOVA was performed to compare the responses of four categories of educational credentials.

**H4.4 Income levels will affect how parents are involved in their children's foreign language learning.**

This hypothesis was tested by performing ANOVA to compare responses of the yearly income level categories.

**5. Have parents' attitudes and involvement changed from those reported in 1993 and 2002 surveys?**

**H5 There will be no difference between attitudes and involvement reported in 1993 and 2002 and those reported for the current study.**

To compare 1993, 2002 and current responses, the responses were examined with ANOVA.



## **Limitations**

Selecting participants from an 800 square mile geographic section of one state limited the generalizability to larger populations of parents of elementary school children. As previously noted, this limitation was amplified by surveying only those parents whose children were currently enrolled in FLES programs. Nevertheless, the diverse ethnic and socio-economic populations of the selected elementary schools, coupled with multiple educational and career opportunities within the targeted county, enhanced the probability that representatives from a variety of demographic subsets were included.

Of those who did respond, 110 (74.5%) reported themselves as white. The school system reported percentage of white students during the same time period was 53.8. This result presented an unanticipated concern. Purposeful stratified or purposeful random sampling may need to be considered in future studies involving this population of parents of elementary school students.

The study was only administered in English. Parents with limited English speaking and reading skills might not have been able or inclined to participate. The demographics of the target county and selected schools suggested this was not the case for most participants. However, with the continually growing numbers of non-English speakers moving to the area, it was a concern that was acknowledged.

While the county residents enjoyed wide economic and ethnic diversity, the close proximity of numerous post-secondary institutions added a dimension that has not been applicable to many other settings in the state. However, inclusion of and analyses of demographic data provided a richer base of information from which to interpret the data (Creswell, 2005).

The lack of outside research funding resulted in a limit to the number of surveys distributed, prevented a pre-survey mailing to alert participants of about the study and served as a barrier to second mailings. A return rate of less than a fourth of the distributed surveys suggested the introduction of bias. Data collected from surveys returned excluded the attitudes and involvement of non-respondents (Gall, et al, 2003). This limitation remained a concern.

Using an instrument administered in previous inquiries, and having those data available for comparison, inspired confidence in the design and findings of the current study. The researcher anticipated interesting results that would add to the existing body of knowledge concerning parent attitudes about and involvement with foreign language in the elementary school.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Results and Interpretations**

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to add to the body of knowledge regarding parents' attitudes and involvement, presently and over time, toward the learning of a foreign language by children, specifically those parents who had children in elementary schools with FLES (foreign language in the elementary school). The results and statistical analyses of parent responses to the questionnaire have been detailed in this section.

#### **Quantitative Inquiry**

Quantitative inquiry was chosen to conduct this study to provide descriptive data documenting parent attitudes toward and involvement with foreign language education in elementary schools in contemporary North Carolina. The investigation was a replication of research projects conducted and supervised by Dr. Audrey Heining-Boynton in 1993 and 2002 with the intent of comparing results to data collected in those studies, and to discern differences over time (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003). A demographic component was added to allow for a richer description of attitude and involvement responses.

School characteristics have been depicted in Table 1. The selected schools whose websites indicated they had Title 1 programs were schools with higher numbers of low income students, usually as measured by the free and reduced lunch program (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2008). It appeared from the program features of each school as provided on their websites that this study included a wide range of income levels, as 16 Title 1 and 25 non-Title 1 schools were included. The highest number of returns, six (6) and seven (7) were from non-Title 1 schools. One Title 1 school did have five (5) returns. No selected school had more than seven returns and the two schools with zero (0) returns were both Title 1 schools, although both were also magnet schools with FLES and ESL programs.

**Table 1. Characteristics of Selected Schools**

School Program	Number	%	Returns	%
Traditional	13		49	
Magnet	15		51	
Year-Round	12		43	
Total Schools	41	100%	145	100%
FLES/ESL/Title 1	12	29.3%	29	20.0%
FLES/ESL	15	36.6%	65	44.8%
FLES/Title 1	2	4.8%	5	33.3%
ESL/Title 1	2	4.8%	3	2.1%
FLES Only	3	7.3%	16	11.0%

ESL Only	3	7.3%	12	8.3%
Title 1 Only	0		0	0%

Note: Information unavailable from two school websites; therefore, not included

After mailing 615 surveys to 15 families from each of 41 schools identified as having a FLES program, either currently or in the recent past, 145 usable surveys were returned by participants for a return rate of 28.6%. This return was analytically sufficient, though a higher number of responses would have resulted in a broader understanding of parents' attitudes and involvement with FLES. Financial constraints prohibited the use of strategies such as pre-mailings to prepare participants to expect the survey, or to mail reminder post cards to those who had not responded within two weeks. Either or both of these strategies may have resulted in a noticeably higher return rate. The small number of responses received from non-White parents with less than a Bachelor's degree and who earned less than \$50,000 in 2006 was likely another factor in the lower-than-anticipated number of returns.

A total of 27 surveys were returned to the researcher as undeliverable. The number of surveys analyzed in 1993 was 449, and in 2002 there were 180 analyzed (Table 2).

The schools included in the study were initially identified from their websites as schools with FLES. Reviewing the websites at the conclusion of the study revealed that six no longer reported having a FLES program. ESL (English as a Second Language) programs were provided at thirty-five (35) of the 41 schools, and sixteen (16) of the schools were Title 1 schools. Title 1 is a federal program that provides instructional support funding to schools with high numbers of students eligible for free and reduced

lunch. Title 1 schools frequently have higher populations of Non-white students, though not always.

### **Demographics of Responding Participants**

The participants for this study were chosen randomly from enrollment lists provided by the Wake County School system of the 41 elementary schools identified by school websites as providing FLES in 2006-2007 to kindergarten through fifth grade students. The only identifiers available as to parent gender were addresses including a female parent's name. Several addresses contained only the phrase "The Parent of (Student's Name)." No identifiers were available to indicate race/ethnicity, educational background, or yearly income. The selection strategy used was to blindly select a name from the enrollment list of each school, and count off every 50<sup>th</sup> name. When repeated family names and/or addresses occurred, those entries were counted as one entry. From this mode of participant sample selection, the researcher expected the demographics to reflect those of the school district (Gall, et al, 2003).

Table 2 depicts the return numbers and percentages for the gender of the parent participants. The data describing the gender characteristics of respondents raised questions concerning its reflection of the population of Wake County. According to updated census information found in North Carolina State Demographics (NCSD) (2000), in July of 2006 Wake County had 393,930 males, with a median age of 32.54 years old. In the same time period, Wake County had 396,077 females, with a median age of 34.52 years old. Participants for this study were not asked about their age, but it could

be reasonably assumed that their ages were between 20 and 50 since they were parents of elementary aged children.

No similar gender information was available about the parents of Wake County Public School System students. Based on county statistics, however, it would be reasonable to suspect the ratio of male to female respondents to the questionnaire was not reflective of the county population or parents of the students attending Wake County Public Schools. The low number of responses from male parents might have been the result of the majority of the surveys being addressed to the mother. Traditional parenting roles may also have led female parents to automatically respond to school related matters, or for male parents to automatically hand school related mail to the female parent.

The 2006-2007 kindergarten through high school population was described as 0.3% American Indian, 5.0% Asian, 10.2% Hispanic/Latino, 26.8% African American, 53.8% White, and 3.9% Multi-Racial (WCPSS, 2006). The general population of Wake County in 2005 as estimated by the U. S. Census Bureau approximating the schools' racial/ethnic make up as: 0.4% American Indian, 4.40% Asian, 7.4% Hispanic/Latino, 20.6% African American, 66.4 % White, and 1.4% Multi-Racial (NCSD, 2002). Though not exact, the racial/ethnic profile of the school population was comparable to that of the county (Table 2).

Participants' self-report of race/ethnicity, shown in Table 1, did not mirror the racial/ethnic profile of either the school population or the estimated county population. The number of American Indian parents responding was only 1, which was .7% of the total. There were 7 responses (5.0%) from Asians, and 8 responses (5.7%) from Hispanics/Latinos. From African Americans 13 responses (9.2%) were received, and

from Multi-Racial parents 4 responses (2.8%) were received. The number of respondents who reported themselves as White was notably higher with 108, percentage of 76.6, of the 145 responses.

These data suggested that those who responded to the survey did not closely reflect the racial/ethnic profile of the general population or that of students in the school system. This would lead one to hypothesize that there might be a general mistrust of the schools by non-White parents, thereby resulting in a lack of participation in school related activities. Because the responses from the subgroups other than White were so few, the variable was collapsed into two categories, White and non-White, for analytical purposes.

The demographic data describing educational background reported that 2.1% (3 responses) the respondents held less than a high school diploma; 4.2% (6 responses) had graduated from high school or earned a GED or other equivalency; 21.7% (31 responses) had some college experience or held an associate's degree; and 72.0% (103 responses) held a Bachelor's degree or higher (Table 2). This variable was also collapsed for analytical purposes into two categories: Less than a Bachelor's degree and Bachelor's degree or higher. Since the variable was collapsed into two categories, ANOVA tests were no longer appropriate, and independent samples t-tests were performed.

It was not possible to compare the educational backgrounds of the respondents to those of the larger population of parents of WCPSS students as the data was not available from WCPSS. While the study site is rich in opportunities for earning a high school diploma, associates degree, and Bachelor's and higher degrees, 72% of participants reporting they held Bachelor's or higher degrees appeared questionable. This may lead



one to hypothesize that parents with higher level educational backgrounds were more accustomed to responding to surveys, or more comfortable with sharing their attitudes and involvement practices regarding the education of their children, and in particular, with their children's FLES experiences.

Table 2 contains demographic data describing participants' yearly income. This variable had seven categories from which to choose. There were 4 responses from parents who earned less than \$15,000 in 2006, which was 3.2% of the total responses. There were 9, or 7.1% from those who earned \$15,000 to \$34,999, and also 9 (7.1%) from parents who earned \$35,000 to \$49,999. From parents who earned \$50,000 to \$74,999 there were 17 (13.5%) responses. There were 30 (23.8%) responses from parents earning \$75,000 to \$99,999 in 2006, and also 30 (23.8%) responses from parents earning \$100,000 to \$149,999. From the \$150,000 or more category, there were 27 responses for 21.4%. Because the combined categories of less than \$15,000, \$15,000 to \$34,999, and \$35,000 to \$49,999 totaled 17.4%, they were collapsed into one category renamed "less than \$50,000" for analytic purposes.

Of the 41 schools selected for this study, 16, or 39%, were Title 1 schools (Appendix A). Since Title 1 by law is a program serving schools with high populations of low income students, it is reasonable to assume that parents earning less than \$50,000 were part of the sample, but chose not to respond. This suggested that parents in this category were uninterested in participating, or perhaps were too concerned with their family's financial health to have time or energy to be concerned with a school related survey.

The pattern of less than one half of the 15 families selected from each school responding could lead one to propose that many parents did not find the topic of this survey to be interesting or important. The data clearly demonstrated lower participation by non-White, male, less educated, and lower income parents, which supported the earlier hypotheses that perhaps these sub-groups were less trustful of school related surveys or perhaps had less time or energy to put into participating.

Table 2 also shows the frequencies for each of the study years being compared. The number of responses in each category for this variable was reasonable to test it with ANOVA.

**Table 2. Demographics: Return Numbers and Return Rates for Gender, Race/Ethnicity, Educational Background, Yearly Income Level, and Study Years 1993, 2002, and 2007**

Characteristic	Number	Percentage
<u>Gender</u>		
Male	15	10.5%
Female	128	89.5%
Total	143	100%
<u>Race/Ethnicity</u>		
American Indian	1	.7%
Asian	7	5.0%
Hispanic/Latino	8	5.7%
African American	13	9.2%
White	108	76.6%
Multi-Racial	4	2.8%
Total	145	100%
<u>Educational Background</u>		
Less than high school graduate	3	2.1%
High school graduate (includes GED or other equivalency)	6	4.2%
Some college or associate degree	31	21.7%
Bachelor's degree or higher	103	72.0%
Total	145	100%

**Yearly Income**

Less than \$15,000	4	3.2%
\$15,000 to \$34,999	9	7.1%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	9	7.1%
\$50,000 to 74,999	17	13.5%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	30	23.8%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	30	23.8%
\$150,000 or more	27	21.4%
Total	145	100%

**Study Year**

1993	449	58.2%
2002	180	23.3%
2007	143	18.5%
Total	774	100%

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**Results of the Questionnaire**

The frequencies of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD) are reported in Table 3. Statements beginning with “My child...” were determined to test parent attitudes; and, statements beginning with “I...” were about parent involvement. Items 14, 15, and 16 asked about the parent’s and child’s foreign language experiences outside of the school program.

The first item (Table 3) asked about the child’s talking about foreign language class at home. There were 121 responses to this item. Parents strongly agreed that their child did talk about FLES at home by 17.1%, agreed by 61.8%, disagreed by 11.4%, and strongly disagreed by 9.8%. To the second statement that the child’s comments are positive about FLES, 29.0% strongly agreed, 58.1% agreed, 7.3% disagreed, and 5.6% strongly disagreed.

Parents responded to item 3, that their child felt successful in FLES with 22.3% SA, 60.7% A, 12.5% D, and 4.5% SD. Asked about their agreement that their child liked

FLES, 34.2% strongly agreed, 55.6% agreed, 6.0% disagreed, and 4.3% strongly disagreed. The parents strongly agreed by 33.3%, agreed by 55.9%, 5.4% disagreed, and 5.4% strongly disagreed with the fifth item that their child liked the FLES teacher.

The responses to the first five items tended to be mostly in agreement, indicating generally positive attitudes by parents about their children's FLES experiences. These responses suggest that parents engaged in conversation with their children, thereby expressing their own attitude about foreign language learning and promoting its value to their children.

FLES Evaluation Survey items 6, 7, and 8 (Table 3) began with "I..." and were determined to be expressions of parent involvement with foreign language learning. Item 6 concerned parent receipt of enough FLES information. As seen in Table 3, the respondents strongly agreed by 3.3%, and agreed by 30.6% that this was the case. On the other hand, 42.1% disagreed and 24.0% strongly disagreed with this statement. The total of 66.1% disagreeing that they received enough FLES information might have indicated that parents would appreciate more communication from the school about foreign language learning objectives and activities than they had been receiving.

Item 7 asked parents to express their agreement to having seen their child performing in a foreign language program. There were 9.7% SA and 19.4 A to this statement, totaling to 29.1% generally agreeing. There were 45.6% D and 25.2% SD for a total of 70.8% disagreeing with this statement. These data suggested that parents had not seen a FLES program. Reasons for this might have included a lack of performances presented; lack of information about planned performances (a possibility suggested by disagreement to item 6); and/or, incompatible school and parent work schedules.

Parents were asked their level of agreement with item 8, which stated that they had visited their child's FLES classroom. With this statement, there were 6.7% SA and 10.5% A, for a total of 17.2% in general agreement. There were 55.2% D and 27.6% SD, which summed to 82.8% disagreeing that they had visited the FLES classroom. This suggested that parents had not considered visiting the FLES classroom; that the school had not indicated that they were welcomed to make such a visit; and, (as with seeing a FLES performance) that school and work schedules were incompatible.

Survey items 9 and 10 were "My child..." statements, and therefore assessments of parent attitudes, as shown in Table 3. Item 9 asked for parent agreement to the statement that the child brought home FLES worksheets, song handouts, or information. Parent responses to this item were 12.9% SA, and 36.2% A, for a total of 49.1% agreement. Disagreeing were 30.2% and SD were 20.7% SD, for a total of 50.9% of generally disagreed. Because the results were nearly evenly divided between agree and disagree, it could be deduced that there was a lack of consistency in FLES teaching strategies or that not all children had shared foreign language handouts with their parents. Similar responses were given for item 10, asking if the child used foreign language at home. Parents strongly agreed with this statement by 11.0%, agreed by 38.6%, disagreed by 31.5%, and strongly disagreed by 18.9%. The overall disagreement to this statement was 50.4%, which indicated that parents had not overwhelmingly observed their children using foreign language at home.

Items 11 and 12 were statements beginning with "I," and were measurements of parent involvement (Table 3). Item 11 asked parents about their agreement that they were in favor of teaching a foreign language to children. Generally parents tended to agree

with this statement, with 72.3% SA and 24.8% A. Only 1.5% responded with D, and 1.5% SD. Parents were asked about their agreement that FLES class did not jeopardize their child's progress in other academic areas, such as reading or math. To this statement 61.0% strongly agreed (SA), 31.7% agreed (A), 3.3% disagreed (D), and 4.1% strongly disagreed (SD).

With 97.1% in agreement that they were in favor of teaching children a foreign language, it was apparent that parents either considered FLES beneficial or an acceptable subject for their children to explore. At the same time, 92.7% of parents agreed that FLES did not interfere with other academic areas. These responses further support the perception that parents found FLES to be at least acceptable. It would be reasonable to assume that parents would be less favorable of foreign language learning if they perceived FLES to be a distraction to their child's progress in reading or math.

Only parents of children demonstrating academic difficulties and/or at risk of failing, or identified as learning disabled were directed to respond to attitude item 13. There were only 21 responses to this item with 4.8% SA, 23.8% A, 47.6% D, and 9.5% SD. These figures sum to 28.6% in general agreement and 57.1% in general disagreement. The number of responding parents to whom this item applied was low, and therefore difficult to earnestly decipher reasons for the predominantly disagreement responses. Additionally, there were parents who did respond to this item by indicating "not-applicable," which explains the missing 14.3% of responses.

Questionnaire item 14 asked parents if their child received foreign language instruction outside the elementary school. Item 15 inquired about the parent's ability to speak a language in addition to English, and 16 asked if a language besides English was

the primary language of the parent. These items provided additional data about parents' attitudes about and involvement with foreign language knowledge and learning of their own, as well as that of their children. The frequency of responses to these items has been displayed in Table 3.

These data showed that 13.3% of the parents reported that their children were receiving additional foreign language instruction outside the school program, and that 86.7% reported their children were not. Thirty percent (30%) of parents indicated they themselves spoke a language in addition to English and 69.9% reported they did not. As regards having a primary language of their own other than English, 15.5% of the parents reported that they did, while 84.5% reported they did not. These data suggested that even among parents who agreed that FLES was beneficial for children; the parents themselves had limited experiences with languages other than English.

**Table 3. Frequencies: Parent Responses to Questionnaire Items**

	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Total (N)</b>
1. My child talks at home about foreign language class.	17.1	61.8	11.4	9.8	100% (121)
2. My child's comments are positive about foreign language learning.	29.0	58.1	7.3	5.6	100% (122)
3. My child feels successful in the foreign language class.	22.3	60.7	12.5	4.5	100% (110)
4. My child likes the foreign language.	34.2	55.6	6.0	4.3	100% (115)
5. My child likes the foreign language teacher.	33.3	55.9	5.4	5.4	100% (109)
6. I am receiving enough information about the foreign language program at	3.3	30.6	42.1	24.0	100% (119)

our elementary school.

7. I have seen my child performing in a foreign language school program.	9.7	19.4	45.6	25.2	100% (102)
8. I have visited my child's foreign language classroom. (103)	6.7	10.5	55.2	27.6	100%
9. My child brings home foreign language worksheets, song handouts, or information.	12.9	36.2	30.2	20.7	100% (114)
10. My child uses foreign language at home.	11.0	38.6	31.5	18.9	100% (125)
11. I am in favor of teaching a foreign language to children.	72.3	24.8	1.5	1.5	100% (135)
12. I feel that studying foreign language has not jeopardized my child's progress in other subject areas, such as math or reading.	61.0	31.7	3.3	4.1	100% (120)
13. Answer this question only if your child is having academic difficulties and is at risk of failing or is learning disabled. My child is benefiting from the elementary foreign language program at our elementary school.	4.8	23.8	47.6	9.5	100% (21)

	Yes (Percent)	No (Percent)	Total (Percent)
14. Is your child receiving additional foreign language instruction outside of the elementary school program?	19 (13.3%)	124 (86.7%)	143 (100%)
15. Do you speak another language(s) in addition to English?	43 (30.1%)	100 (69.9%)	143 (100%)
16. Is a language other than English your primary language?	22 (15.5%)	120 (84.5%)	142 (100%)



## **Measurement of Variables**

The independent variables were gender, ethnicity, educational background, and income level. These characteristics were displayed in Table 2. The fifth and final research question concerned changes in attitude and involvement over time. The dependent variables studied in this question were attitude and involvement in 1993, 2002, and 2007. The independent variable was the study year, as seen in Table 3. Cronbach's alpha was computed and resulted in a value of .86 (for items 1-13) to ensure the responses had adequate internal consistency, which required a Cronbach's alpha of 0.5 or above to be considered acceptable.

The dependent variables for this study were parents' attitudes about learning foreign language in elementary school, and parents' involvement with their children's foreign language learning. Attitude statements (1-5, 9, 10 and 13) and involvement statements (6, 7, 8, 11 and 12) were statistically treated descriptively and comparatively.

## **Statistical Analysis**

The research questions and hypotheses for this study are listed here, followed by the statistical tests and results. An alpha level of .05 was used for all statistical tests.

### *Research Question 1*

#### **1. What are parents' attitudes about their children learning foreign languages?**

The answer to this question has been presented in Table 3 showing parents' responses to the attitude items (1-5, 9, 10 and 13).

Questionnaire items that measured parent attitudes were those statements that began with "My child..." as these statements reflected the sense of enjoyment and

success the responding parents' children had about their foreign language classes. These data showed that parents agreed by 78.9% (17.1% SA, 61.8% A) to item 1 that their children talked at home about FLES class. Responding parents generally agreed to item 2 by 87.1% (29.0% SA and 58.1% A) that their children made positive comments about foreign language learning. Item 3 measured parents' sense of their child feeling successful in FLES, and 83.0% (22.3% SA, 60.7% A) of the parents agreed to their child's feeling of success.

Item 4 was also a measure of parents' attitudes. When asked if they believed their child liked the foreign language class, 89.6% agreed (34.2 % SA and 55.6% A). Item 5 asked parents if their child liked the FLES teacher, and 89.2% (33.3% SA, 55.9% A) agreed that their child did. These data showed that parents had generally positive attitudes toward foreign language learning for the child and for the experiences their child was having in FLES.

Two exceptions to parents' positive attitudes about foreign language learning were item 9 concerning the school-to-home foreign language learning via worksheets, song handouts, or other pertinent FLES information; and, the child's use of the foreign languages (item 10), for which they were evenly split between agreement and disagreement (Table 3). For the school-to-home foreign language learning statement (item 9), 50.9% of parents disagreed (30.2%) or strongly disagreed (20.7%) with that their child brought home FLES worksheets or song sheets as compared to 49.1% who strongly agreed (12.9% SA) or agreed (36.2% A). In the case of the child using the foreign language at home (item 10), 50.4% disagreed (31.5%) or strongly disagreed

(18.8%) that their child did use foreign language at home, while 49.6% agreed (11.0% SA, 38.6%) with this statement.

The results for items 1 through 5 appeared to be reflective of parents' attitudes based on casual conversation with their children. Items 9 and 10 asked more about ongoing communications and child behaviors or interactions with foreign language. In the latter cases, the data indicated that parents' attitudes based on more concrete or observational experiences were not as positive or as decisive. These results may have indicated that parents and children were engaged in positive discussions about learning a foreign language, but were less certain with demonstrations of what had been learned.

#### *Research Question 2*

### **2. Do parents' characteristics affect their attitudes about their children learning foreign languages?**

This research question was rigorously analyzed and interpreted in detail by testing the effect of each of four parent characteristics on their responses.

#### *Research Question 2: Hypothesis 1*

### **H2.1 Gender will affect parents' attitudes about their children learning foreign languages.**

To test this hypothesis independent samples t-tests were performed to compare female and male responses.

Results of gender effects on parent attitudes are displayed in Table 4. All *p*-values were found to be greater than 0.05, indicating no gender effect on parents' attitudes toward FLES. These values have to be interpreted with the recognition that only 15 respondents were male, while 128 were female.

**Table 4. Independent Samples T-Tests: Gender and Parents' Attitudes**

		Group N	Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
1. My child talks at home about foreign language class.	Male	12	2.67	1.103	111	.272	.548
	Female	107	2.12				
2. My child's comments are positive about foreign language learning.	Male	12	2.00	.229	112	.819	.108
	Female	108	1.89				
3. My child feels successful in the foreign language class.	Male	10	1.50	-.894	101	.373	-.490
	Female	98	1.99				
4. My child likes the foreign language.	Male	11	1.00	-1.499	105	.137	-.819
	Female	103	1.82				
5. My child likes the foreign language teacher.	Male	10	2.00	.334	100	.739	.190
	Female	97	1.81				
9. My child brings home foreign language worksheets, song handouts, or information.	Male	10	1.50	-1.599	105	.113	-1.090
	Female	102	2.59				
10. My child uses foreign language at home.	Male	12	2.33	-.586	116	.559	-.310
	Female	111	2.64				
13. Answer this question only if your child is having academic difficulties and is at risk of failing or is learning disabled. My child is benefiting from the elementary foreign language program at our elementary school.	Male	2	2.64	.089	18	.930	-.105
	Female	18	2.00				

Note:  $p < 0.05$

## *Research Question 2: Hypothesis 2*

### **H2.2 Race and ethnicity will affect parents' attitudes about their children learning foreign languages.**

This hypothesis was tested by performing independent samples *t*-tests to compare responses of White and non-White races and ethnicities. The categories for this variable were collapsed from six down to two so that the numbers of responses were appropriate for analytical purposes.

The independent samples *t*-test of this hypothesis, have been reported in Table 5. For item 1, "My child talks at home about foreign language class." the responses resulted in a *t*-value of 2.362, with 91.283 (unequal variances not assumed) degrees of freedom, and a mean difference of .310, which was significant at the .020 level. For the item asking about the child's use of foreign language at home (item 10) the *t*-value was 5.707, the degrees of freedom (unequal variances not assumed) were 72.986, and the mean difference was .830, which was significant at the .000 level. These data suggested that parent race/ethnicity might affect their attitudes about their child learning a foreign language.

**Table 5. Independent Samples T-Tests: Race/Ethnicity and Parents' Attitudes**

		Group N	Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
1. My child talks at home about foreign language class.	White	92	2.22	2.362	91.283	.020	.310*
	Non-White	32	1.91				
2. My child's	White	108	1.92	.926	97.974	.357	.110

comments are positive about foreign language learning.	Non-White	12	1.81				
3. My child feels successful in the foreign language class.	White	98	2.00	.270	79.520	.788	.030
	Non-White	101	1.97				
4. My child likes the foreign language.	White	103	1.85	1.116	116	.267	.170
	Non-White	11	1.68				
5. My child likes the foreign language teacher.	White	97	1.83	.364	78.547	.717	.050
	Non-White	10	1.79				
9. My child brings home foreign language worksheets, song handouts, or information.	White	102	2.60	.417	115	.677	.090
	Non-White	10	2.52				
10. My child uses foreign language at home.	White	111	2.80	5.707	72.986	.000	.830*
	Non-White	12	1.97				
13. Answer this question only if your child is having academic difficulties and is at risk of failing or is learning disabled. My child is benefiting from the elementary foreign language program at our elementary school.	White	18	2.07	-.111	.20	.913	-.050
	Non-White	2	2.13				

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Note:  $p < 0.05$

*Research Question 2: Hypothesis 3*

**H2.3 Educational levels will affect parents' attitudes about their children learning foreign languages.**

To test this hypothesis independent samples t-tests were performed to compare the responses of those with Less than Bachelor's to those with a Bachelor's or higher. The categories for this variable were collapsed from four down to two so that the numbers of responses were appropriate for analytical purposes.

Educational background choices originally ranged from less than a high school diploma to a Bachelor's or higher degree. The independent samples t-tests performed on the collapsed categories of < Bachelor's (less than a Bachelor's) and  $\geq$  Bachelor's (Bachelor's degree or higher) have been detailed in Table 6. For item 3, indicating parent attitudes about their child feeling successful in foreign language class, the *t*-value was 2.420, the degrees of freedom 112, and the mean difference was .366. These data were significant to the .017 level and suggested parent educational background might affect parent attitudes about FLES in this case.

**Table 6. Independent Samples T-Tests: Educational Background and Parents' Attitudes**

	Group N	Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
1. My child talks at home about foreign language class.	<Bachelor's 34 $\geq$ Bachelor's 91	2.24 2.10	.830	123	.408	.136
2. My child's comments are positive	<Bachelor's 35 $\geq$ Bachelor's 91	2.00 1.86	.935	124	.352	.143

about foreign  
language learning.

3. My child feels successful in the foreign language class.	<Bachelor's ≥Bachelor's	31 83	2.26 1.89	2.420	112	.017	.366*
4. My child likes the foreign language.	<Bachelor's ≥Bachelor's	31 88	1.81 1.81	-.002	117	.998	.000
5. My child likes the foreign language teacher.	<Bachelor's ≥Bachelor's	29 84	1.83 1.82	.038	111	.970	.006
9. My child brings home foreign language worksheets, song home home or information.	<Bachelor's ≥Bachelor's	32 86	2.72 2.55	.871	116	.386	.172
10. My child uses foreign language at home.	<Bachelor's ≥Bachelor's	33 97	2.55 2.59	-.228	128	.820	-.042
13. Answer this question only if your child is having academic difficulties and is at risk of failing or is learning disabled. My child is benefiting from the elementary foreign language program at our elementary school.	<Bachelor's ≥Bachelor's	11 11	2.09 2.09	.000	20	1.000	.000*

Note:  $p < 0.05$

#### *Research Question 2: Hypothesis 4*

### **H2.4 Income levels will affect parents' attitudes about their children learning foreign languages.**

This hypothesis was tested by performing ANOVA to compare  
responses of the yearly income level categories.



Parents were asked to report their 2006 before taxes income. Their choices were from less than \$15,000 to higher than \$150,000. Due to low responses in three subgroups, collapsing was conducted to create a category of *less than \$50,000*, with a total of 22 responses in this category. The category of *\$50,000 to \$74,999* had 17 responses: *\$75,000 to \$99,999* had 30; *\$100,000 to \$149,999* had 30; and, *\$150,000 or more* had 27. The sizes of the revised categories were more appropriate for analytical purposes.

By performing an ANOVA a significant difference was found for item 10, which measured the effect of income level on parent attitudes about their children using the FLES at home (Table 7). For this item the  $F(4, 111) = .720$  and  $p = .004$ . With the ANOVA finding a significant  $p$  of .004, post hoc analyses were performed using Tukey's post hoc tests.

**Table 7. ANOVA: Yearly Income Level and Parents' Attitudes**

	N	F	df	Sig.
1. My child talks at home about foreign language class.	110	.848	4, 105	.498
2. My child's comments are positive about foreign language learning.	111	.771	4, 106	.547
3. My child feels successful in the foreign language class.	100	1.021	5, 94	.401
4. My child likes the foreign language.	105	.728	4, 100	.575
5. My child likes the foreign language teacher.	101	2.002	4, 96	.100
9. My child brings home foreign language worksheets, song handouts, or information.	104	.720	4, 99	.554

10. My child uses foreign language at home.	116	4.160	4, 111	.004*
13. Answer this question only if your child is having academic difficulties and is at risk of failing or is learning disabled. My child is benefiting from the elementary foreign language program at our elementary school.	20	.164	4, 15	.953

Note:  $p < 0.05$

The Tukey's HSD analyses resulted in a mean difference = -.979, and  $p = .003$  when comparing the income level categories of *less than \$15,000* to *\$75,000 to \$99,999* (Table 8), as well as a mean difference = -.896,  $p = .009$  when comparing *less than \$15,000* to *\$150,000 or more*. There were no significant  $p$  values when comparing the other categories within the variable. These results indicated that yearly income levels did affect parent attitudes about children learning a foreign language for at least to income levels higher than \$49,999. The lower numbers of responses for the lower income categories, coupled with the two identified differences revealed suggested that this variable could be studied further for more detailed comparisons.

**Table 8. Tukey's HD Test for Income Level and Attitudes Item 10**

Dependent Variable	Income Level (Mean)	Income Level (Mean)	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.
10. My child uses foreign language at home.	Less than \$50,000 (1.87)	\$50,000 to \$74,999 (2.54)	-.588	.318	.352
		\$75,000 to \$99,999 (2.93)	-.979	.262	.003*
		\$100,000 to \$ 149,999	-.567	.260	.194

(2.52)			
\$150,000 or more	-.896	.266	.009*
(2.85)			

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Note:  $p < 0.05$

### *Research Question 3*

#### **3. How are parents involved in their child's foreign language learning?**

The frequency of responses to this question was presented in Table 3 of the parents' responses to the involvement questions (items 6, 7, 8, 11 and 12).

Parents' responses to items concerning parent **involvement** indicated that 3.3% strongly agreed, 20.6% agreed (an overall total of 23.9% in general agreement), 42.1% disagreed and 24.0% strongly disagreed (an overall total of 66.1% in general disagreement) with item 6 that they were involved in their child's learning of a foreign language through the method of parents receiving information from the school FLES program. These results indicated that characteristics did affect parent involvement with the child learning foreign language as measured by their receipt of information about the FLES program.

Parents responding to item 7, that they had seen their child performing in a foreign language school program strongly agreed (SA) by 9.7% and agreed (A) by 19.4%, for an overall agreement to involvement in this way of 29.1%. Those who responded that they disagreed (D) (45.6%) or strongly disagreed (SD) (25.2%) represented 70.8% of parents replying to this item. The higher percentage of parents reporting not attending a FLES performance suggested parents did not express their involvement with foreign language learning in this manner.

Parent involvement as measured by their visiting their child's foreign language classroom was the topic of item 8. The results of this item were a 6.7% SA and 10.5% A, for a combined 17.2% overall statement of agreement. The remaining responses included a 55.2% D and 27.6% SD, for a combined 82.8% overall statement of disagreement. As with the item above, addressing involvement by attending a FLES program, the responses to item 8 indicated that parents did not become involved with foreign language learning by visiting the FLES classroom.

Those who, for item 11, reported they favored children learning a foreign language strongly agreed (72.3%) or agreed (24.8%) for an overall agreement of 97.1%. This result suggested that parents did express involvement in foreign language by supporting its inclusion in the elementary education academic program.

Item 12 addressed parents' finding that FLES had not jeopardized their child's progress in other subjects, such as math or reading. The results of responses to this item were 61.0% SA and 31.7% A that FLES posed no interference with progress in other academic areas. Those disagreeing represented 3.3%, and strongly disagreeing 4.1%. The overall 92.7% agreeing that foreign language did not pose a barrier to learning of other subjects tended to confirm that parents were sufficiently involved with FLES activities, and other school expectations, as to determine there were no conflicts from foreign language learning that affected overall success.

#### *Research Question 4*

#### **4. Do parents' characteristics affect how they are involved in their children's foreign language learning?**

This research question was rigorously analyzed and interpreted in detail by testing the effect of each of four parent characteristics on their responses.

*Research Question 4: Hypothesis 1*

**H4.1 Gender will affect how parents are involved in their children's foreign language learning.**

To test this hypothesis independent samples t-tests were performed to compare female and male responses.

Table 9 shows that the independent samples t-tests performed on the effect of gender on parent involvement revealed no significant difference, suggesting this hypothesis cannot be supported. As with the items concerning attitude, these results have to be viewed with the understanding that only 15 respondents were male, while 128 were female.

**Table 9. Independent Samples T-Tests: Gender and Parents' Involvement**

		Group N	Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
6. I am receiving enough information about the foreign language program at our elementary school.	Male	12	2.33	-1.127	107	.262	-.553
	Female	105	2.86				
7. I have seen my child performing in a foreign language school program.	Male	9	2.00	-1.301	92	.196	-.870
	Female	91	2.85				
8. I have visited my child's foreign language classroom.	Male	10	3.00	-.132	93	.895	-.065
	Female	91	3.04				
11. I am in favor of teaching a foreign	Male	12	1.33	-.023	124	.981	-.008
	Female	122	1.33				

language to children.

12. I feel that studying foreign language has not jeopardized my child's progress in other subject areas, such as math or reading.	Male	12	1.33	- .449	109	.654	-.204
	Female	106	1.53				

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Note:  $p < 0.05$

#### *Research Question 4: Hypothesis 2*

##### **H4.2 Race and ethnicity will affect how parents are involved in their children's foreign language learning.**

This hypothesis was tested by performing independent samples  $t$ -tests to compare responses of White and non-White races and ethnicities. The categories for this variable were collapsed from six down to two so that the numbers of responses were appropriate for analytical purposes.

Parents' responses to item 8 about the effects of race/ethnicity on parents visiting their child's foreign language classroom suggested evidence to support the hypothesis that race/ethnicity affects parents' involvement in the learning of the foreign language. Table 10 contains the results of the independent samples  $t$ -tests of the hypothesis. The  $t$ -value in this case was 2.355, the degrees of freedom was 69.365 (unequal variances not assumed), a mean difference of .34, a  $p$ -value of .021, which was a significant difference as based on the 0.05 level of significance. The responses to the remaining involvement items offered no additional evidence in favor of the hypothesis. Item 7 concerned parent involvement as shown by attending a foreign language school performance. However, the

results for this item showed a  $t$ -value of 1.751 (df 103), a mean difference of .36, and a  $p$ -value of .083. While  $p = .083$  was not a significant difference at the 0.05 level, its proximity to that level, and the similar mean differences of .34 (item 7) and .36 (item 8) might indicate there was enough evidence to support the hypothesis that race/ethnicity affected parent involvement in their child's foreign language learning.

**Table 10. Independent Samples T-Tests: Race/Ethnicity and Parents' Involvement**

		Group N	Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
6. I am receiving enough information about the foreign language program at our elementary school.	White	93	2.91	-1.621	121	.108	.28
	Non-White	30	2.63				
7. I have seen my child performing in a foreign language school program.	White	79	2.94	1.751	103	.083	.36
	Non-White	26	2.58				
8. I have visited my child's foreign language classroom.	White	81	3.10	2.355	69.365	.021	.34*
	Non-White	25	2.76				
11. I am in favor of teaching a foreign language to children.	White	106	1.31	-.277	136	.782	-.030
	Non-White	32	1.34				
12. I feel that studying foreign language has not jeopardized my child's progress in other subject areas, such as math or reading.	White	92	1.43	-1.1655	40.316	.106	-.300
	Non-White	30	1.73				

Note:  $p < 0.05$

*Research Question 4: Hypothesis 3*

**H4.3 Educational levels will affect how parents are involved in their children's foreign language learning.**

To test this hypothesis independent samples t-tests were performed to compare the responses of *Less than Bachelor's* and *Bachelor's or higher*. The categories for this variable were collapsed from four down to two so that the numbers of responses were appropriate for analytical purposes.

The independent samples t-tests performed on the collapsed categories of  $< \text{Bachelor's}$  (less than a Bachelor's) and  $\geq \text{Bachelor's}$  (Bachelor's degree or higher) have been detailed in Table 11. For item 11, checking parents' involvement as expressed by being in favor of teaching a foreign language to children, the  $t$ -value was 3.289, the degrees of freedom 53.358 (unequal variances not assumed), and the mean difference was .400. These data were significant at the .002 level. Item 12 asked parents to respond as to whether they had observed that studying foreign language had not jeopardized their child's progress in other subject areas, such as math or reading. The analyses performed on this item showed a  $t$ -value of 3.547, a mean difference of -.516, and a significant  $p$  value of .001. The results of analyses of the two categories in this variable suggested that parent educational background might affect parent attitudes about FLES in these cases, particularly as demonstrated by being in favor of foreign language learning and by noting the impact of FLES on their child's progress in other academic subjects.



**Table 11. Independent Samples T-Tests: Educational Background and Parents' Involvement**

		Group N	Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
6. I am receiving enough information about the foreign language program at our elementary school.	<Bachelor's ≥Bachelor's	32 91	2.91 2.82	.480	121	.632	.082
7. I have seen my child performing in a foreign language school program.	<Bachelor's ≥Bachelor's	27 78	2.93 2.82	.513	103	.609	.105
8. I have visited my child's foreign language classroom.	<Bachelor's ≥Bachelor's	29 78	3.21 2.95	1.448	105	.151	.258
11. I am in favor of teaching a foreign language to children.	<Bachelor's ≥Bachelor's	40 100	1.60 1.20	3.289	53.358	.002	.400*
12. I feel that studying foreign language has not jeopardized my child's progress in other subject areas, such as math or reading.	<Bachelor's ≥Bachelor's	33 91	1.88 1.36	3.547	122	.001	-.516*

Note:  $p < 0.05$

*Research Question 4: Hypothesis 4*

**H4.4 Income levels will affect how parents are involved in their children's foreign language learning.**

This hypothesis was tested by performing ANOVA to compare responses of the yearly income level categories.

As when analyzing the effects of parents' yearly income on parent attitudes about FLES, due to low responses in three subgroups, collapsing was conducted to create a category of *less than \$50,000*, with a total of 22 responses in this category. The category of *\$50,000 to \$74,999* had 17 responses; *\$75,000 to \$99,999* had 30; *\$100,000 to \$149,999* had 30; and, *\$150,000 or more* had 27. The sizes of the revised categories were more appropriate for analytical purposes.

The hypothesis that yearly income level affects parent involvement in their child's learning of a foreign language was not supported by the ANOVA. Table 12 shows there were no significant *F* values for any item when responses from yearly income levels were compared to involvement items. The lack of evidence supporting this hypothesis should be considered carefully in light of the collapsing of the lower levels of reported income.

**Table 12. ANOVA: Income Level and Parents' Involvement**

	N	F	df	Sig.
Q6. I am receiving enough information about the foreign language program at our elementary school.	109	1.351	4, 105	.256
Q7. I have seen my child performing in a foreign language school program	94	.916	4, 90	.458
Q8. I have visited my child's foreign language classroom.	96	.198	4, 92	.939
Q11. I am in favor of teaching a foreign language to children.	123	1.699	3, 119	.155
Q12. I feel that studying foreign language has not jeopardized my child's progress in other subject areas, such as math or reading.	108	.415	4, 104	.797

Note:  $p < 0.05$

### *Research Question 5*

#### **5. Have parents' attitudes and involvement changed from those reported in 1993 and 2002 surveys?**

This research question was rigorously analyzed and interpreted in detail by testing the responses in of each of the three study years, 1993, 2002, and 2007.

### *Research Question 5: Hypothesis*

#### **H5     There will be no difference between attitudes and involvement reported in 1993 and 2002 and those reported for the current study.**

This hypothesis was tested by performing ANOVA to compare 1993, 2002, and current responses.

The null hypothesis that there would be no differences between attitudes and involvement as reported in the 1993, 2002, and current study was not supported by the evidence found during this ANOVA (Table 13). The results for item 9 showed  $F(2, 652) = 8.668$  and  $p = .000$ , significant at the  $< .05$  level. This item measured parents' attitudes by being aware of their child bringing home foreign language worksheets, song handouts, or information. As for attitude item 10, parents reported on their child's use of foreign language at home. The  $F$  value for this item was 7.536, the degrees of freedom were 2 and 687, and the  $p$  value was .001. This was significant at the set  $< .05$  level. Both of these items demonstrated that attitudes, as expressed by observing children's FLES worksheets or by noticing the child's use of the foreign language at home, had changed over time. Tukey's HSD post hoc analyses were then performed for a more detailed report of where these differences occurred.

**Table 13. ANOVA: Study Years 1993, 2002, and 2007**

	<b>N</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
1. My child talks at home about language class.	702	.556	2, 700	.574
2. My child's comments are positive about foreign language learning.	687	.099	2, 685	.906
3. My child feels successful in the foreign language class.	669	.097	2, 667	.908
4. My child likes the foreign language.	696	.448	2, 694	.470
5. My child likes the foreign language teacher.	670	.076	2, 668	.927
6. I am receiving enough information about the foreign language program at our elementary school.	704	.751	2, 702	.472
7. I have seen my child performing in a foreign language school program	600	2.697	2, 598	.068
8. I have visited my child's foreign language classroom.	574	.266	2, 572	.766
9. My child brings home foreign language worksheets, song handouts, or information.	654	8.668	2, 652	.000*
10. My child uses foreign language at home.	689	7.536	2, 687	.001*
11. I am in favor of teaching a foreign language to children.	736	1.978	2, 734	.139
12. I feel that studying foreign language has not jeopardized my child's progress in other subject areas, such as math or reading.	699	1.745	2, 697	.175
13. Answer this question only if your child is having academic difficulties and is at risk	96	1.394	2, 94	.253

of failing or is learning disabled. My child is benefiting from the elementary foreign language program at our elementary school.

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Note:  $p < 0.05$

The Tukey's post hoc analyses for item 9 resulted in a mean difference = .298,  $p = .003$  when comparing 1993 to 2002. It also found a mean difference = .314,  $p = .003$  when comparing 1993 to 2007, as seen in Table 14. Item 10 inquired about the child's use of foreign language at home, and significant differences were found for this item in both ANOVA and Tukey's testing. Both of these differences indicated that 1993 attitudes and involvement were significantly different from those in 2002, and 2007. One explanation for these differences might be found in the numbers of responses analyzed. In 1993 there were 774 responses, in 2002 there were 180, and in 2007 there were 145 responses.

**Table 14. Tukey's HD Test for 1993, 2002, and 2007 Study Years and Items 9 and 10**

Dependent Variable	Between Study Year (Mean)	And Study Year (Mean)	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.
9. My child brings home foreign language worksheets, song handouts, or information.	1993 (2.90)	2002 (2.61)	.298	.090	.003*
	1993 (2.90)	2007 (2.59)	.314	.097	.003*
	2002 (2.61)	2007 (2.59)	.016	.115	.989
10. My child uses foreign language at home.	1993 (2.24)	2002 (2.40)	-.169	.088	.136
	1993 (2.24)	2007 (2.58)	-.343	.092	.001*

2002 (2.40)	2007 (2.58)	-.174	.111	.260
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Note:  $p < 0.05$

The frequencies of responses to individual items from each year provided additional data about the significant differences over time for attitude items 9 and 10. Results as provided in Table 15 indicated that for item 9 the parents' strongly agreed (16.2%), agreed (31.7%), disagreed (27.5%) and strongly disagreed (24.6%) in 1993 that their child brought home FLES worksheets, song handouts, or information. Results for this item in 2002 were 9.8% SA, 28.5 A, 37.7 D, and 23.9 SD. In 2007, parents responded with 12.9% SA, 36.2% S, 30.2% D, and 20.7% SD. When comparing the combined agreement results from each study year, 1993 had 47.7% in agreement, 2002 had 38.3% in agreement, and 2007 had 49.1% in agreement. These figures described more clearly how the percent of agreement with this item decreased by 9.4% from 1993 to 2002; increased from 2002 to 2007 by 10.8%; and then, increased again in 2007 at a slightly higher rate (1.7%) than in 1993. These results suggested some form of instability in parents' beliefs or awareness that their children had brought home FLES handouts and worksheets.

Frequencies also provided a clearer picture of the significant difference over time about the child's use of foreign language at home, item 10. In 1993, results showed that 19.9% SA and 37.6 A, for a total of 52.75% generally agreeing. Those who generally disagreed with this statement in 1993 represented 42.5% (24.8% D and 17.7% SD). In 2002, 71.8% agreed (23.6% SA and 48.2% A), while 28.2% disagreed (18.1% D and 10.1% SD) that their child used foreign language at home. The results for this item in 2007 were 49.6% agreed (11.0 SA and 38.6% A) and 50.4% disagreed (31.5% D and

18.9% SD). Comparing the results across time revealed a 19.05% increase in agreement from 1993 to 2002; a 22.2% decrease in agreement from 2002 to 2007; and a 3.15% decrease of those in agreement in 2007 as compared to those agreeing in 1993. The ANOVA, Tukey's post hoc analyses, and detailed frequencies did not provide evidence to discount the hypothesis that there would be no effect over time in the case of the child using foreign language at home.

**Table 15. Frequencies: 1993, 2002, and 2007 Parent Responses to Attitude and Involvement Items 9 and 10**

<b>Study Year Item</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Total (N)</b>
<i>1993</i>					
9. My child brings home foreign language worksheets, song handouts, or information.	16.2	31.7	27.5	24.6	100% (142)
10. My child uses foreign language at home.	19.9	37.6	24.8	17.7	100% (141)
<i>2002</i>					
9. My child brings home foreign language worksheets, song handouts, or information.	9.8	28.5	37.7	23.9	100% (1280)
10. My child uses foreign language at home.	23.6	48.2	18.1	10.1	100% (1352)
<i>2007</i>					
9. My child brings home foreign language worksheets,	12.9	36.2	30.2	20.7	100% (114)

song handouts, or information.

10. My child uses foreign language at home.	11.0	38.6	31.5	18.9	100% (125)
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Note:  $p < 0.05$

### **Summary of Findings**

Initially the results of this questionnaire suggested that respondents to this study tended to hold positive attitudes about children learning foreign language in elementary school, and that they collectively were involved in their children's FLES programs. Significant differences were not prevalently found for items measuring attitude as affected by gender, race, educational, or income levels. This suggested that parents of children enrolled in schools with FLES programs tended to hold favorable views about these programs regardless of parent gender, race, education level, or income level.

More definitive examinations showed that specific attitude items seemed to be affected by specific parent characteristics. Specifically, independent samples t-tests conducted to find effects of race/ethnicity on attitudes resulted in significant differences for items concerning the child's discussion about foreign language at a  $p$  value of .020 and mean difference of .310; and, for use of foreign language in the home at a  $p$  value of .000, and a mean difference of .830 between responses of non-Whites and those of Whites (Table 5).

Independent samples t-testing of the effects of educational background on parent attitudes found a significant difference at the .017 level between educational backgrounds of less than a Bachelor's degree and those with a Bachelor's degree or higher when analyzing parents' attitudes about their child's feelings of success in FLES (Table 6).



These results indicated that parents with less than a Bachelor's degree had contrasting attitudes accomplishments in foreign language than did those with a Bachelor's or higher experiences in education.

ANOVA and Tukey's post hoc treatments also found significant differences in parents' attitudes as affected by yearly income level for the item concerning the child's use of foreign language at home at the .004 level between parents earning less than \$50,000 and those earning more, as depicted in Tables 7 and 8.

Questionnaire items measuring parent involvement also showed significant differences when analyzing responses delineated by race and by educational background. Specifically, there was a race/ethnic effect on involvement as shown in a difference at the .021 level between Non-whites and whites who reported visiting the FLES classroom, as shown in Table 10.

Differences based on the effect of educational backgrounds of parents on the item about being in favor of foreign language instruction were revealed at the .002 level between parents with less than a Bachelor's degree and those with a Bachelor's or higher (Table 11). Likewise, there was a significant difference at the .001 level found among those with less than a Bachelor's and a Bachelor's or higher when reporting recognition that FLES had not jeopardized their child's progress in other academic subjects. No significant differences were found in testing for the effect of yearly income on parent involvement with foreign language learning (Table 12).

No discernable differences were found between male and female parents on either attitudes about or involvement with children learning foreign language (Tables 4 and 9). These findings were interpreted with caution, as the ratio of male to female respondents

was 15-128. This was a characteristic that warranted further investigation in a more controlled study.

The ANOVA performed to test for changes over time in parents' attitudes and involvement revealed mixed results. Significant differences were found for the attitude items asking about the child's bringing home handouts and information from the FLES class, and about the child's use of foreign language at home (Table 13). Tukey's post hoc analyses (Table 14) clarified the results by identifying significant decreases in agreement when comparing 1993 to 2002 and significant increases in agreement when comparing 1993 to 2007 in the case of the child bringing home handouts and information. As for the child's use of foreign language at home, Tukey's post hoc found a significant decrease in agreement between responses submitted in 1993 and those submitted in 2007.

In addition to the primary data obtained from the responses to survey items, 41 of the 145 parents chose to add open ended comments (Appendix D). Some of these comments simply provided information about the participants, such as how many learning disabled children the parent had (in response to item 13 directing only parents of special needs or at risk children to address) or use of an interpreter to complete the survey. Other comments strongly endorsed the learning of a foreign language; others remarked on the quality of current foreign language delivery programs; and, several questioned the purpose of teaching a foreign language at a time when so many immigrants were non-English speakers.

Based on the results and analyses of the responses parents provided in this questionnaire, this investigation did add to the body of knowledge concerning parents' attitudes about and involvement with foreign language education for their children. It was

apparent from the responses that there was an overall positive view point and support for FLES. It was equally apparent that parent characteristics did affect their attitudes and involvement with their children's foreign language learning. The effect of parent characteristics on attitude and involvement appear to be pertinent foci of subsequent investigations.

## **Chapter V**

### **Discussion**

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to add to the body of knowledge regarding parents' attitudes and involvement, presently and over time, toward the learning of a foreign language by children, specifically those parents who had children in elementary schools with FLES (foreign language in the elementary school).

The population surveyed in this case was parents of students attending kindergarten through fifth grade in public schools with foreign language education in the elementary school (FLES) programs. The over-time comparisons were made with studies conducted in 1993, 2002, and 2007.

#### **Theoretical Framework**

Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence (Epstein, 1987) provided the theoretical framework for this study. The spheres of influence overlap to illustrate the ideal and important roles of the school, the community, and the family in securing the best possible educational experience for the child. Each sphere represents a strong domain discussed in the literature as underpinning the importance of the attitudes and

beliefs a parent and community hold concerning the purposes and needs for learning a second language, with historical background and traditions informing and shaping these attitudes. This study focused on the influence of the family sphere, more specifically the parents, in the foreign language education of children.

### **Research Questions**

Addressing the purpose, these research questions and their associated hypotheses guided the investigation:

1. What are parents' attitudes about and involvement in their children learning foreign languages?
2. Do parents' characteristics affect their attitudes about their children learning foreign languages?
  - H2.1 Gender will affect parents' attitudes about their children learning foreign languages.
  - H2.2 Race and ethnicity will affect parents' attitudes about their children learning foreign languages.
  - H2.3 Educational levels will affect parents' attitudes about their children learning foreign languages.
  - H2.4 Income levels will affect parents' attitudes about their children learning foreign languages.
3. How are parents involved in their child's foreign language learning?
4. Do parents' characteristics affect how they are involved in their children's foreign language learning?

- H4.1 Gender will affect how parents are involved in their children's foreign language learning.
- H4.2 Race and ethnicity will affect how parents are involved in their children's foreign language learning.
- H4.3 Educational levels will affect how parents are involved in their children's foreign language learning.
- H4.4 Income levels will affect how parents are involved in their children's foreign language learning.
- 5. Have parents' attitudes and involvement changed from those reported in 1993 and 2002 surveys?
- H5 There will be no difference between attitudes reported in 1993 and 2002 and those reported for the current study.

What follows are the answers to each of the research questions.

*Research Question 1: Attitudes*

**1. What are parents' attitudes about their children learning foreign languages?**

Survey items 1 through 5 were items involving direct communication between the parent and the child about how the child felt about foreign language class, the teacher, and his/her success in the class (See Appendix C). The assumption was that parents spoke to their children about foreign language and about their foreign language experiences at school. These conversations might have been on-going or have taken place only in response to the questionnaire.

The first item focused on the child's talking about foreign language class at home. Parents responding to this item strongly agreed (17.1%) or agreed (61.8%) by 78.1% with this statement. The second statement that the child's comments were positive about FLES was strongly agreed with (29.0%) or agreed with (58.1%) by 87.1% of parents. That their child felt successful in the foreign language class was the focus of item 3. Responders strongly agreed (22.3%) or agreed (60.7%) by 83.0% with this statement.

The fourth item asked if the child liked the foreign language class. Parents strongly agreed (34.2%) or agreed (55.6%) by 89.8% that their child did. Item five asked parents to report whether or not their child liked the foreign language teacher. Parents strongly agreed (33.3%) or agreed (55.9%) by 89.2% that the child did like the FLES teacher.

The high percentages of parents agreeing with these five items demonstrated that parents tended to have positive attitudes about their child learning a foreign language. Since the parents' knowledge base for responding to these statements required interaction and dialogue with their child about foreign language class and experiences, parent responses reflected their positive attitudes as garnered and expressed by their family relationships and dynamics (Epstein, 1987).

Those attitude items that received lower percentages of strongly agree and agree responses included item 9, which asked parents if their child brought home information via worksheets, handouts, and being visitors in the foreign language class. Parent responses to this item were 12.9% SA, and 36.2% A, for a total of 49.1% agreement. Likewise, item 10 received a lower percentage in agreement by 49.6% (11.0% SA and 38.6% A) with the statement that child used foreign language at home. Lowered percentages of agreement to these two items (as compared to those agreeing with the first

five items) about the availability of opportunities for such direct interactions with the child's foreign language activities suggested that parents would like more information about FLES. These two items left open the question of whether or not parents' positive attitudes about FLES were strong enough to want or expect such information (Bandura, 2002), or if parents were satisfied that the school was meeting their child's FLES needs without paper or performance examples provided by the school (Sheldon, 2002; Epstein, 1987).

Attitude item 13 was addressed to parents of children who were experiencing academic difficulties, were at risk, or were learning disabled. Specifically, these parents were asked to agree or disagree that their children were benefiting from the FLES program. This item received 57.1% disagree (47.6%) and strongly disagree (9.5%) responses, with 21 parents answering. A total of 145 responses were received, therefore, the parents answering this item represented a small subset. The item did not delineate the range of special needs students had, nor did it specify what might be considered beneficial for these students by learning a foreign language (Cohen, Linker, & Stutts, 2006). Parents with generally positive attitudes about FLES might have had overriding priorities for their children with special needs and/or at risk of academic difficulties.

Studies have shown that the study of foreign language can enhance cognitive development by developing pattern recognition and problem solving skills (Harley, 1986). Yet, parents with students receiving services for disabilities in math might be mostly focused on their child's progress in math problem solving skills, just as those whose children have specific behavioral disabilities might be more concerned with the child's self-control progress than participation in FLES.



Additionally, parents with children identified as at risk of academic difficulties might prefer to have their children spending more time in reading and mathematics support classes than in foreign language. The attitude toward FLES of parents of children experiencing difficulty might also hold an element of questioning the ability of their children to learn a foreign language when they have been unable to show proficiency in English (Tinsley & Parker, 2006).

### *Research Question 2: Attitudes*

## **2. Do parents' characteristics affect their attitudes about their children learning foreign languages?**

### *Parental Gender Effects on Attitudes*

Results of the independent samples t-test indicated no effect of gender on parents' attitudes toward FLES (Table 6). This analysis must be interpreted carefully, in that only 15 respondents reported being male while 128 reported being female. The surveys were mailed to parents, and were addressed to the name provided to the researcher by the school system. In most cases, the receiving parent was female. In some cases, no parent name was listed, and those surveys were sent to "The Parent of..." It would be interesting to know if there would have been more responses from males if all the mailings had been addressed only to "The Parent of." Any impact from a more balanced number of responses from males and from females might have on the effect of gender on parent attitudes remains unanswered by this study.

### *Parental Race/Ethnicity Effects on Attitudes*

When analyzed for the effects of race/ethnicity on parent attitudes, the independent samples t-test resulted in  $t = 2.362$  and a mean difference of .310, significant at the .020 level for the item asking if the child talks about foreign language class at home. For the item asking if the child uses foreign language at home, the  $t$  was 5.707, and the mean difference was .830, which were significant at the .000 level. The planned ANOVA could not be conducted for this variable because the American Indian group had fewer than two cases.

The choices and responses for this independent variable included American Indian (1, .7%), Asian (7, 4.8%), Hispanic or Latino (8, 5.5%), African American (13, 9.0%), and White (108, 74.5%), Multi-Racial (4, 2.8%). As reported in Chapter 3, the Wake County public kindergarten through high school population as 0.3% American Indian, 5.0% Asian, 10.2% Hispanic or Latino, 26.8% African American, 53.8% White, and 3.9% Multi-Racial (WCPSS, 2006).

The percentage of participants who reported themselves White was 76.6%, which was 22.8% higher than that of the school system population. These discordant figures raised questions about generalizability from the parents who responded to the larger population of parents of elementary children (Gall, et al, 2003). The participants were selected randomly from all schools identified on their websites as having a FLES program. One question that remained, then, was how similar in racial diversity each of these schools was to the overall Wake County School population. The Wake County School System had a goal and student-school assignment policy of maintaining school diversity by using socio-economic factors (free and reduced lunch) as opposed to

traditional racial diversity. A further demographic profile of each school would add to the data to detect a racial/ethnic effect on parent attitudes.

#### *Parental Educational Background Effects on Attitudes*

The analyses of survey responses suggested there might have been an effect of educational background level on parents' perceptions that their child felt successful in FLES. The  $t =$  value for this item was 2.420, and the mean difference was .366, which were significant at the .017 level. The percentage of all participants strongly agreeing (22.3%) and agreeing (60.7%) that their child did feel successful in FLES was 83%, indicating that a high number of parents were aware of their child's feelings of success in general, and specifically concerning FLES.

The survey had four categories for this variable, and 72% of those responding reported having a Bachelor's degree or higher. The remaining 28% were spread over the remaining categories (Table 4). Due to the low response from those subgroups, they were collapsed into one. The study site was situated geographically in an area rich in community colleges, private colleges, and research universities. It had recently been reported by the news media that Raleigh, the county seat of Wake County, was tied with San Francisco for second place in numbers of bachelor's degrees, and seventh nationwide in holders of advanced degrees (Christie, 2006).

Despite this observation of Raleigh's high ranking in terms of a highly educated citizenry, it is doubtful that the percentage of parents of Wake County elementary students with a Bachelor's degree or higher was as great as the survey suggested. Therefore, it appeared that the voices of those with less than a Bachelor's degree were largely unrepresented in this study. Perhaps those parents who had not completed four

years of college were intimidated by the survey that arrived in an envelope printed with the university return address. Past experiences may have left these parents distrustful that their responses would be taken seriously (Gardner, 1985). New studies focusing on the reason(s) for so few responses from this group of parents could shed light on how these parents influence their children's approach to education and to FLES.

#### *Parental Yearly Income Level Effects on Attitudes*

Parent yearly income levels did not appear to affect their attitudes about children learning a foreign language. On first analyses, there appeared to be an income level effect on the item addressing the child's use of foreign language at home. Performing the Tukey's post hoc tests, no correlating significance was found. After reviewing the number of responses from each subgroup, it was determined that the responses from the three categories encompassing incomes less than \$50,000 were small in comparison to those of \$50,000 and above. The subgroups with small response numbers were collapsed into one group of "Less than \$50,000." ANOVA analyses remained the appropriate treatment for this variable, and found no significant differences among the newly formed categories.

Results of the initial ANOVA did raise questions about possible effects yearly income levels had on parent attitudes about FLES. The income level of the parent might have been tied to parent attitudes about FLES depending on the amount of time the parent had to devote to considering the importance of learning a foreign language (Kroeger, 2005). Attitudes might also have been affected by the amount and nature of contact the parent had with other language speakers while engaged in career-related activities

(Bartram, 2006; Watzke, 2003). This study did not support that these, or other income based variables, had an effect on parent attitudes.

### *Research Question 3: Involvement*

#### **3. How are parents involved in their child's foreign language learning?**

Parents responded positively to involvement items 11 with 97.1% of respondents strongly agreeing (72.3%) or agreeing (24.8%) that they were in favor of children learning a foreign language. Parents strongly agreed (61.0%) or agreed (31.7%) by 92.7% with item 12, that they did not feel that studying a foreign language had jeopardized their child's progress in other subjects. These responses suggested that the parents had been actively involved in attending to their child's school and FLES experiences.

Parent responses to items 6, 7, and 8 did not appear to be as positive. Respondents disagreed (42.1%) or strongly disagreed (24.0%) by 66.1% that they did not receive enough information about the FLES program, item 6. This might suggest that parents would like to be even more involved, as suggested by Bandura's (2002) observations that shared beliefs and perceptions are formed through interactive actions; and, in the Cooper & Maloof (1999) report of parents in Arizona working to establish a foreign language program despite financial barriers in the school system. This item included the word *enough*, and with 66.1% disagreeing with this statement, that word is very informative.

The parents' apparent perception that they did not receive enough information about FLES might have impacted their reported lack of attendance at FLES performances (70.8% disagreed or strongly disagreed that they had attended a performance) in item 7; and, foreign language class visitation (82.8% disagreed or strongly disagreed that they

had visited the FLES classroom), as reported in item 8. It would be fair to assume that parents may not have had knowledge of opportunities to visit these classrooms and performances, as was also suggested in the literature by Sheldon (2002) as he studied and reported on the importance communication with parents to support their involvement and their expectations of a school-parent partnership in their child's education. It may also be possible that such opportunities did not exist; limiting the opportunities parents had to be more involved with FLES. Epstein (1987) highlighted this limitation in her research about the importance of schools establishing systems to provide parents with the information and opportunities they needed to become more involved.

#### *Research Question 4: Involvement*

#### **4. Do parents' characteristics affect how they are involved in their children's foreign language learning?**

##### *Parental Gender Effects on Involvement*

A closer look at the data did not indicate that involvement in FLES was affected by gender. The subgroup of male respondents was small as compared to that of female respondents, as was true for the attitude items. The traditional gender roles in parenting had shifted somewhat over the past fifty-plus years, yet women and mothers continued to be more visible than men and fathers in elementary schools during the school day (Watzke, 2003). There are likely many reasons for this phenomenon, including those that might be related to attitudes and those related to experience, availability and convenience (Kravtsova, 2006; Bandura, 2002). It would be interesting and informative to study further the possible effects of parent gender on involvement with FLES.

### *Parental Race/Ethnicity Effects on Involvement*

The independent samples t-tests on the effect of race/ethnicity on parent involvement in FLES suggested a variance for item 8, which inquired about the parent having visited the FLES classroom. From analyses, the  $t = 2.355$ , the mean difference = .34, and the  $p = .021$ . In other words, a difference was found between White parents visiting the foreign language classroom and Non-white parents visiting. This difference was found even as the overall percentage of parents disagreeing with having visited the FLES classroom was 82.8%. As discussed in the parent attitude section, the study sample was not wholly reflective of the racial population of the school system. This limited the generalizability of the findings to the larger population (Gall et al, 2003). It did, however, raise questions as to why there was a detectable difference between Whites and non-Whites in reporting visits to their child's FLES classroom, particularly when only 17.2% of all respondents reported visiting at all. It would be informative to know if this result would be found for visiting classrooms in the school in general, or if it would be true mostly for specific classes such as foreign language. The findings of this study concurred with findings by Kroeger (2005) that the more affluent and White parents were more actively volunteering to support instruction in one urban school. It would also be useful to learn if the schools, either as a system or as separate entities, encouraged or even allowed parent visitation during instructional time, as were parents supporting students with special needs in Virginia (Cohen et al, 2006) and as encouraged by Epstein & Sanders (2006).

### *Parental Educational Background Effects on Involvement*

Analyses for the effect of parents' educational background on parent involvement with FLES showed some variances. The categories for this variable were folded from four into only two: less than a Bachelor's degree; and, a Bachelor's degree or higher. Independent samples t-tests were then performed to analyze the responses. Item 11 on the survey asked parents if they were in favor of teaching foreign language to children. For this item, the  $t = 3.289$ , the mean difference = .400, and the  $p = .002$ , indicating a difference between parents with less than a Bachelor's degree and those with a Bachelor's or higher about favoring their children learning a foreign language. The frequency of all parents agreeing that they were in favor of teaching a foreign language to children was 97.1%. In as much as 72% of parents reported having a Bachelor's degree or higher, and 97.1% of all parents reported being in favor of FLES, it would be instructive to more thoroughly include the participation of parents with less than a Bachelor's degree.

Additionally, there was a significant difference found between these groups when parents agreed or disagreed with item 12 that FLES did not jeopardize their child's progress in other subject areas. The  $t = 3.547$ , the mean difference = -.516, and the  $p = .001$ , indicating an effect of educational background on parent observations that FLES did not interfere with progress in other subjects. As with the statement about favoring FLES, the overall percentage of parents agreeing that FLES was not a barrier to progress in other subjects was 92.7%. This result strengthens the recommendation to seek additional data for this variable.

These results brought into question how these differences were manifested within families. For instance, perhaps parents with higher levels of education more actively



sought information about foreign language programs at school than other parents (Heining-Boynton, 1993). Possibly some parents had more knowledge and experience than others about how to become involved with FLES (Cooper & Maloof, 1999). It is plausible that parents with increasing levels of education had themselves taken foreign language classes and became intent on supporting foreign language learning. Another proposition is that parents who sought higher levels of formal education for themselves held different views about the value of formal education for its own sake, resulting in different needs or desires to become involved in FLES and other school programs as reported by Watzke (2003) in his description of different purposes for including foreign language study for certain groups of students at varying points in the history of American education.

#### *Parental Yearly Income Level Effects on Involvement*

There appeared to be no effect of parent yearly income levels on parent involvement in FLES. This could be seen as encouraging in that it suggested socioeconomic levels did not influence parent involvement in the education of their children. These survey items provided opportunities for the parents to report on their involvement with FLES both at home and at school. Parents whose work schedules might have been incompatible with school activities could be as equally involved (or uninvolved) as those with more flexible work schedules (Kroeger, 2005). This characteristic of the questionnaire could be viewed as a strength of the study instrument. The findings were also cautiously reviewed with questions about how much the responding parents reflected the larger population of parents of elementary school children, a limitation when using

surveys to collect data (Gall et al, 2003), as the numbers representing those earning less than \$50,000 a year were relatively small.

*Research Question 5: Attitudes and Involvement over Time*

**5. Have parents' attitudes and involvement changed from those reported in 1993 and 2002 surveys?**

The ANOVA performed on the data when the year was the independent variable indicated differences in attitude items 9 and 10. Item 9 item measured parents' attitudes by being aware of their child bringing home foreign language worksheets, song handouts, or information. The ANOVA for this item found an  $F = 8.668$ , with (2, 652) degrees of freedom, and a  $p = .000$ , suggesting that over time parents were either receiving varying amounts of FLES handouts and information, or had changed their awareness of these materials being brought home. Item Q.10 asked about the child's use of foreign language at home. The ANOVA for this item found an  $F = 7.536$ , with (2, 687) degrees of freedom, and a  $p = .001$ . This significant difference indicated that some changes had occurred over time in the child's use of foreign language at home or in the parents' presence.

Post hoc analyses supported these findings at the .003 level of significance for item 9 when comparing 1993 to 2002, and a review of the frequencies of responses for each year yielded more detailed information. When comparing the combined agree results from each study year, 1993 had 47.7% in agreement, 2002 had 38.3% in agreement, and 2007 had 49.1% in agreement. These analyses indicated that changes had

occurred in the rate of children bringing home foreign language worksheets, song handouts, or information.

For item 10 about the child's use of foreign language at home, Tukey's post hoc analyses detected differences between responses from 1993 and 2007, significant at the .001 level. The frequencies of responses for 1993 revealed that 52.75% of parents generally agreed with this statement. In 2002, 71.8% generally agreed, and in 2007, 49.6% generally agreed. It would be interesting and informative to learn the relationships between these two years, and also why the percentage of those agreeing in 2002 was noticeably high. It might also be important to analyze social and educational events and trends that may have caused significant differences from year to year for only these two survey items.

Significant differences in responses to the items dealing with foreign language handouts and the child's use of foreign language at home over the three years, 1993, 2002, and 2007, might reflect some instability based on FLES delivery programs changing within a school, changes in foreign language teaching personnel, and repetitious lessons. As noted by Epstein & Sanders (2006), parents influence their children's educational development, and are aware of changes in the school's approach to providing foreign language services. The increased use of technology in teaching and communication might have impacted a child's feelings of success and attempts to use foreign language at home, and also lessened paper communication from the school to the home.

Politically based issues such as conflict between the United States and Iraq, and large influxes of immigrants might also have impacted parents' responses to this item, as

documented by Watzke (2003) throughout the history of America's development. In cases where parents whose attitudes were negative toward children learning a foreign language, and whose feelings were strong enough to elaborate in the comment section, one has to wonder about their underlying reasons. Comments such *"I do not feel that my children should be forced to learn Spanish. We do not speak Spanish at home or with our friends."*

and

*"...Although I am for a child to learn it I don't think it should be forced especially Spanish. Spanish folks need to learn English if they are going to call themselves US citizens."*

and

*"I feel that the elementary schools foreign language program suffers because of the amount of time and resources spent to adapt ESL students to speak English and making Spanish the primary foreign language option."* might be interpreted as more politically charged than educationally based. Additional comments can be seen in Respondent's Comments, Appendix D.

The National Organic Poll (NOP) reported that some Americans saw no reason to learn a foreign language since the rest of the world was learning English (Tinsley & Parker, 2006), supporting the idea that Americans valued English over other languages. The United States has had a history of acceptance of and resistance to languages other than English, as reported by Daniels (1990). Respondents to the current study might have reacted to the recent and continuing large influx of non-English speaking immigrants, as

the comments above suggested, rather than reflecting on any possible educational benefits of second language learning for their own children.

Approximately one-third of the parents offered comments in hearty support of FLES.

*“The younger children start learning a foreign language the better!”*

and

*“All kids need to learn another language to survive.”.*

Some of the comments offered parent evaluation of current programs or FLES delivery models “...We’ve never had a good, consistent teacher and they never seem to learn much other than counting to 10 or 20 and the months of the year. I would be thrilled if my children were exposed to an enriching language class.”

and

*“My child has studied Spanish in 3 different grade levels. She seems to study the same curriculum each year, including numbers, colors, days of week, family members, & months. I’d like for her to learn some common phrases.”*

A number of comments contained remarks on the importance of learning a foreign language to be successful citizens in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For example:

*“...Schools have cut the funding for it. I really believe that it should be mandatory to learn a foreign language to prepare our students for the 21st century.”*

and

*“However, this year the school does not have a foreign language OR computer class and I am very disappointed. I feel both are critical for today’s world.”*

These views were in tandem with traditional American views that the study of other languages was advantageous educationally, professionally, and socially (Heining-Boynton, 1993; Cummins, 2000; Watzke, 2003). Survey results and comments offered by many participants, pointed to the importance and actuality of the family sphere in Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence (Epstein, 1987). Participants who responded to the survey demonstrated their interest in school and FLES issues from the point of view of the family.

### **Further Research**

The comparison of the results of the studies in 1993, 2002, and 2007 showed that over time parents' attitudes and involvement had generally remained positive about FLES. Differences in the child bringing home FLES handouts and information, as well as in the child's use of foreign language at home, suggested a need for more in-depth investigations about what parents think FLES should look like and what it might accomplish. The survey used was user friendly and asked for basic information, as recommended by Gall et al (2003) when collecting data by surveys. A new study might ask parents to prioritize basic academic subject areas, or ask parents to list the most important four academic subjects to inform educators about the level of commitment parents have to foreign language education.

Another study might investigate the concepts and skills parents would consider to be the benefits of learning a foreign language. Additional research might be conducted to explore what parents think would constitute an effective FLES delivery model. The

following comments indicated that parents were interested in the outcomes of time and energy devoted to foreign language learning:

*“Spanish is the foreign language taught at my children's school. There is one 45 minute class per week by a teacher who comes to their room. It is nice that they are being exposed to a foreign language at a young age, but I don't feel it is enough to ever promote fluency or even conversational fluency.”*

and

*“The teacher in my child's class uses total immersion with no book to supplement instruction. Therefore, he is totally lost and thinks of his experience as listening to “noise” once a week. Total immersion does not (sic) for once a week.”*

The results of responses to all of the attitude and involvement statements suggested, on the surface, that parents tended to have positive views and actions about foreign language learning for their kindergarten through fifth grade students. Parents agreed by 78.1% that their child talked about foreign language class at home. They agreed by 87.1% that their child made positive comments about FLES. The percentage who agreed that their child felt successful in foreign language class was 83.0%, those who agreed their child liked FLES represented 89.8%, and those who agreed their child liked the foreign language teacher represented 89.2% of the respondents. This was consistent with a National Organic Poll, conducted in 2005, which reported that 90% of American adults believed children should learn a second language (Tinsley & Parker, 2006).

On closer inspection, it became apparent that the parents who chose to participate were predominantly well educated, White, women, who's 2006 yearly income was \$50,000 or more. The sample was randomly selected from 41 schools within the Wake

County School system (Gall et al, 2003). Traditional schools, year-round schools, and magnet schools were all represented, as were schools with and without ESL programs or Title I services. Title I was a federally funded service to provide additional instructional support to schools with high free and reduced lunch students. Therefore, it was assumed that those who chose to respond would generally reflect the demographic profile of Wake County and of the population served by the school system. Analyses of the data discounted this assumption.

This phenomenon was similarly noted by Kroeger (2005) as he studied the involvement of parents in an urban Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), and with volunteering in that school's classrooms. The data showed that many middle and higher income parents were actively involved with the school, though the school demographic profile was considerably more diverse. This raised the question of feelings of trust and self-efficacy on the part of those who did not participate through the PTO or in the classroom (Bandura, 2001).

As this study was grounded in Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence, the paucity of responses from subgroups other than well educated, White women earning \$50,000 or more in 2006 raised concerns about the relationship the other groups sensed or actually had with the schools, and the nature of the influence these parents held over their children in foreign language class. This study did not collect data to interpret the expectations or levels of partnership diverse groups of parents believed they had with their child's school (Sheldon, 2002). This should be a focus of future studies about FLES and about school concerns in general.



Educators and parents intent on providing quality educational opportunities for all children are always bound by the realities of school budgets. With much of Goal 2000 and No Child Left Behind 2002 school reform initiatives focused on reading, writing, math, and science, it may be understandable that financial and staff resources would be expended in those areas first. Yet as the twenty-first century becomes more technologically capable of establishing global relationships and communities, the role of foreign language in communicating with people from many countries and cultures becomes more essential. Foreign language study also remains critical for unlocking and analyzing medical, scientific, and technical knowledge recorded in a variety of languages.

This study added to the body of knowledge by confirming that parents generally had positive attitudes and involvement behaviors toward FLES. Further information was provided to indicate there remained a relatively untapped source of parents whose attitudes and involvement in foreign language learning and in school events in general continued to be unknown. Referring to Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence (1987), it appears paramount to design curricula and school programs that encourage open participation by all families with school aged children. The findings of this study and others provided data about parents' attitudes about and involvement with foreign language learning from which scholars, educators, and policy makers might compose value statements about foreign language learning and design FLES programs that will best meet the needs of students and society.

**Appendix A****Selected Schools**

Id	School	Program	FLES	ESL	Title 1	2006-2007 Enrollment	Number of Survey Returns
304	Adams	Year Round	Yes	Yes	No	798	4
326	Baileywick	Traditional	Yes	Yes	No	607	5
329	Barwell	Year Round	No	Yes	Yes	744	2
328	Baucom	Year Round	Yes	Yes	No	904	5
362	Carver	Traditional	No	Yes	Yes	581	1
364	Cary	Traditional	Yes	Yes	Yes	634	4
380	Conn	Magnet	Yes	Yes	Yes	549	1
390	Davis Dr.	Traditional	Yes	Yes	No	971	4
398	Durant	Year Round	Yes	Yes	Yes	999	4
414	Farmington Woods	Magnet	Yes	Yes	Yes	830	0
416	Fuller	Magnet	Yes	No	Yes	586	4
420	Fuquay	Traditional	Yes	Yes	No	876	2
440	Green	Year Round	Yes	Yes	Yes	588	3
439	Green Hope	Traditional	Yes	No	No	837	6
454	Heritage	Year Round	Yes	Yes	Yes	964	1
442	Hilburn	Traditional	Yes	Yes	Yes	775	3
449	Holly Ridge	Traditional	Yes	Yes	No	714	5
447	Holly Springs	Year Round	Yes	Yes	No	818	3
448	Hunter	Magnet	Yes	Yes	No	779	6
452	Jeffreys Grove	Traditional	u/a	u/a	u/a	585	3
453	Jones Dairy	Year Round	No	No	No	955	5
456	Joyner	Magnet	Yes	Yes	Yes	525	3
468	Lacy	Traditional	Yes	Yes	No	697	6
476	Lincoln	Magnet	u/a	u/a	u/a	630	5
494	Middlecreek	Year Round	No	Yes	No	980	3
496	Millbrook	Magnet	Yes	Yes	Yes	748	5
522	Oak Grove	Year Round	No	Yes	No	864	6
532	Poe	Magnet	Yes	Yes	Yes	373	2
536	Powell	Magnet	Yes	Yes	No	473	2
540	Rand Road	Traditional	No	Yes	No	737	3
572	Underwood	Magnet	Yes	Yes	No	483	7
584	Wake Forest	Magnet	Yes	No	No	712	4
596	Washington	Magnet	Yes	Yes	No	577	4
598	Weatherstone	Traditional	Yes	Yes	No	832	4
600	Wendell	Magnet	Yes	Yes	Yes	556	0
606	West Lake	Year Round	Yes	No	No	1076	6
620	Wiley	Magnet	Yes	Yes	No	399	7
624	Willow Springs	Year Round	Yes	Yes	No	897	1
628	York	Traditional	Yes	Yes	Yes	577	3
632	Zebulon	Magnet	Yes	No	Yes	500	1

## **Appendix B**

## **Cover Letter**

*Letterhead*

*Date*

Dear Parent:

We are conducting a research project to investigate parent attitudes about their children learning foreign language in elementary schools in Wake County, North Carolina. **Please complete and return this survey in the enclosed stamped and self-addressed envelope within seven days of receipt.** We estimate it will take about 10-15 minutes to complete the survey.

**As the focus of this study is parent attitudes about their children learning foreign language in elementary schools in Wake County, North Carolina, the first part of the survey contains statements about your observations of your child's foreign language learning experiences and your own involvement with these experiences. In addition to statements about parent attitudes about their children learning foreign language, the second part of the survey contains questions about your own experiences with foreign language and questions seeking demographic information.**

You are personally invited to participate in this study because you are an expert in your child's educational needs and experiences. **Your participation in this study is voluntary. Should you decide to participate, you may skip over questions you do not want to answer. Please note that we will interpret your completion of the survey as consent to participate. To protect your privacy, your survey will be assigned a number; your name will not be used on any data, and your name or identifying information will not be used in any publication or presentation of this research. Please keep this letter for your records.**

If at any time you have any questions, or if you need any more information about this study, please contact Elaine Cansler at (919) 247-9969 or [cansler@email.unc.edu](mailto:cansler@email.unc.edu). You may also contact her advisor, Dr. Audrey L. Heining-Boynton, at (919) 962-3035 or [ahb@email.unc.edu](mailto:ahb@email.unc.edu). If you would like a copy of a summary of the results of the survey once the study is completed, please let us know.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the ACADEMIC AFFAIRS INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (AA-IRB) at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. You may contact Barbara Davis Goldman, Chair of the AA-IRB if you have questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant at (919) 962-7761 or at [aa-irb@unc.edu](mailto:aa-irb@unc.edu).

Sincerely,

Elaine M. Cansler  
Doctoral Candidate, Curriculum & Instruction  
  
The University of North Carolina at  
Chapel Hill

Dr. Audrey L. Heining-Boynton  
Professor of Education & Romance  
Languages  
The University of North Carolina at  
Chapel Hill

## **Appendix C FLES PROGRAM EVALUATION INVENTORY FOR PARENTS**

Your opinion about foreign language learning is very important. **Please complete all three (3) pages** of the following questionnaire concerning the elementary school foreign language program in your district. Return the form in the enclosed self addressed and stamped envelope within **seven (7) days**. All responses are voluntary and confidential.

**To assist your district in meeting the educational needs of your child, please circle the number that best describes the experiences of your child and yourself.**

1. My child talks at home about foreign language class.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly	Agree	Disagree	Strongly	Not
Agree			Disagree	Applicable

2. My child's comments are positive about foreign language learning.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly	Agree	Disagree	Strongly	Not
Agree			Disagree	Applicable

3. My child feels successful in the foreign language class.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly	Agree	Disagree	Strongly	Not
Agree			Disagree	Applicable

4. My child likes the foreign language.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly	Agree	Disagree	Strongly	Not
Agree			Disagree	Applicable

5. My child likes the foreign language teacher.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly	Agree	Disagree	Strongly	Not
Agree			Disagree	Applicable

6. I am receiving enough information about the foreign language program at our elementary school.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly	Agree	Disagree	Strongly	Not
Agree			Disagree	Applicable

7. I have seen my child performing in a foreign language school program.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable

8. I have visited my child's foreign language classroom.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable

9. My child brings home foreign language worksheets, song handouts, or information.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable

10. My child uses foreign language at home.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable

11. I am in favor of teaching a foreign language to children.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable

12. I feel that studying foreign language has not jeopardized my child's progress in other subject areas, such as math or reading.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable

13. **Answer this question only if your child is having academic difficulties and is at risk of failing or is learning disabled.**

My child is benefiting from the elementary foreign language program at our elementary school.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable

**Now we have a few questions about you and your child. Please mark the blank next to your answer for each of the following items.**

14. Is your child receiving additional foreign language instruction outside of the elementary school program?

☐ Yes  
☐ No

15. Do you speak another language(s) in addition to English?

☐ Yes  
☐ No

16. Is a language other than English your primary language?

☐ Yes  
☐ No

17. What is your gender?

☐ Male  
☐ Female

18. What do you consider your race/ethnicity to be?

☐ American Indian  
☐ Asian  
☐ Hispanic or Latino  
☐ African American  
☐ White  
☐ Multi-Racial.

19. What is your educational background?

☐ Less than high school graduate  
☐ High school graduate (includes GED or other equivalency)  
☐ Some college or associate degree  
☐ Bachelor's degree or higher

20. In 2006, what was your family's yearly income before taxes?

☐ Less than \$15,000  
☐ \$15,000 to \$34,999  
☐ \$35,000 to \$49,999  
☐ \$50,000 to \$74,999  
☐ \$75,000 to \$99,999  
☐ \$100,000 to \$149,999  
☐ \$150,000 or more

**Additional comments:** If you feel this questionnaire did not allow you to adequately express your opinion, or if you would care to elaborate on a particular point(s), please do so in the space below.

*Thank you for your time.*

## **Appendix D**

## **Respondents' Comments**

1. My child received instruction in French at her Montessor (sic) preschool but has not yet received foreign language instruction in kindergarten (to my knowledge). She's fascinated with it though. (smiley face)
2. My children do not speak highly of their Spanish class and do not share the words they are learning, but when asked Questions 3-4, they were positively.
3. My child is in 2nd grade @ [Elementary A] where a foreign language class is not an option until 3rd grade. My comments are based on my daughter's attitude toward the program in anticipation of it & the teacher as she knows him only from the school community.
4. My child seems to like his foreign language experience. He views it as a fun "special" rather than a "subject." Truthfully, we (as parents), do too. Given the level of focus, extention (sic) and ongoing support.
5. I would love for my child to learn a foreign language, but we are not informed from the school how it's taught nor (sic) on how to further teach it at home.
6. The younger children start learning a foreign language the better!
7. All kids need to learn another language to survive.
8. I feel that the elementary schools foreign language program suffers because of the amount of time and resoures (sic) spent to adapt ESL students to speak English and making Spanish the primary foreign language option.
9. I do not feel that my children should be forced to learn Spanish. We do not speak Spanish at home or with our friends.
10. (She is completing this survey with the help of an interpretor [sic].)
11. There is not a foreign language class offered to my daughter at her school. I wish she had the opportunity to be in a bilingual class starting in preschool and continue through elementary.
12. I strongly believe that students should be taught a foreign language at an early age. We are all (the family) trying to learn Spanish, which is the language my daughter takes in school. It is an elective, which meets once-per-week.
13. The teacher in my child's class uses total immersion with no book to supplement instruction. Therefore, he is totally lost and thinks of his experience as listening to "noise" once a week. Total immersion does not (sic) for once a week.



14. I have a 5 & 6 yo (sic). I would adore having them learn a foreign language, but it has never been discussed in their elementary school. They were both born in Australia & have traveled extensively outside the USA. We are US citizens.
15. My daughter is in (sic) a self-contained special education class and has Spanish as one of the "specials". She never makes comments about the class so I don't know if she likes the class, feels successful or likes the teacher. She brought home a coloring sheet from the Spanish class one time. I am never provided any information about what she is learning. I hope she is benefiting from the Spanish class, but I really don't know.
16. Foreign Language is critical to the future of the US.
17. I would like to see more information on the foreign language program at our elementary school. It's simply not addressed at curriculum (sic) night nor at teacher conferences.
18. We are strong supporters of foreign language instruction in the schools. When we moved here in June, 2007, from Overland Park, KS, we were extremely disappointed (sic) to learn that NO foreign language at all was offered at [Middle School A]. Moreover, the elementary kids at [Elementary A] only receive foreign language instruction once a week, which we feel is inadequate. Thank you!
19. Spanish is the foreign language taught at my children's school. There is one 45 minute class per week by a teacher who comes to their room. It is nice that they are being exposed to a foreign language at a young age, but I don't feel it is enough to ever promote fluency or even conversational fluency.
20. My child has studied Spanish in 3 different grade levels. She seems to study the same curriculum each year, including numbers, colors, days of week, family members, & months. I'd like for her to learn some common phrases.
21. My son is in a special pre-K program due to ASD. When he goes to kinderg. (sic) Next yr I hope the school will provide info if they do have foreign lang. class. Although I am for a child to learn it I don't think it should be forced especially Spanish. Spanish folks need to learn English if they are going to call themselves US citizens.
22. In the elementary school that my children attend foreign language (Spanish) is offered but I don't feel that it is stressed as a valued class. We've never had a good, consistent teacher and they never seem to learn much other than counting to 10 or 20 and the months of the year. I would be thrilled if my children were exposed to an enriching language class. My middle school aged child loves foreign language & is very excited about it. I just wish it would've been offered at a younger age with more focus/reinforcement.

23. I don't feel that Wake County keeps foreign language teachers around long enough to establish a relationship with staff and students. They usually hire exchange students. Thanks for including me in the study.
24. Our children attend [Elementary B]-a year round school in [Wake County]. Last year Spanish was one of their weekly specials. Due to enrollment (as decided by our principal?) the program was discontinued for the 2007-2008 school year. We do not currently have a foreign language program.
25. Foreign language is not a new concept to the elementary school level. Many many (sic) years ago, French was taught in my elementary school. We would all benefit from a foreign language.
26. I fell (sic) that requiring a foreign language at school is taking time away from their core studies. Foreign language studies should only be voluntary. Also other Languages should be offered (Spanish is not the only foreign language used). Since I have a military background and German grandfather, I speak Spanish, German, Italian, & French. Unfortunately (sic), Spanish & German are the only fluent ones.
27. I not feel this questionnaire. It is okay with me.
28. Why the "foreign language" euphemism? The only foreign language offered is Spanish. I refuse to speak Spanish. People who choose to reside in the USA should speak English.
29. Our school no longer offers a foreign language class as our enrollment does not justify staff to support it. Parents were not given this information until well into the school year. Good luck!
30. My son seems to enjoy his weekly Spanish class. He does talk about enjoying the puppet and the teacher. However, I wish that the children would have more time doing art or physical activity above the other "specials." Also, less worksheets/color sheets for Spanish class. Color sheets do not belong in kindergarten programs.
31. I have 2 children, 1 is L.D. (sic)
32. We are a bi-lingual family. Parents are German and German is the language spoken at home. My child receives additional foreign language classes once a week. I would welcome it if my child had the opportunity to learn more than one language at her school.
33. Foreign language is not offered at our school. I believe that it should be taught at all grade levels. My children have taken a pre-school Spanish class and still talk about it and how they wish they knew more.

34. Our school does not offer foreign language classes to my knowledge. My kids are in K & 3rd grade and have never been given the option. If it were offered, I would be very happy and gladly let them participate.
35. I don't believe any language is taught at [Elementary C]. My child is only taught through her primary 4th grade teacher. Foreign language should be mandatory.
36. As stated, none of my 3 children are learning a foreign language, but I wish they did! My oldest had Spanish in 3rd - 5th grade, but now the elem. Schools have cut the funding for it. I really believe that it should be mandatory to learn a foreign language to prepare our students for the 21st century. In middle school, students only have 1 elective & while I'd like my kids to learn Spanish they couldn't do band or take other electives like art or drama. I wish it was a core subject like math, language arts, science and SS.
37. Our elementary school had a Spanish teacher last year. Children had Spanish once every six days, as a class in rotation with other specials (P.E., Computer Technology, Art, Music, Library). They do NOT have Spanish this yer (sic) & it is greatly missed by children, parents, & staff! It doesn't appear that Spanish or any other foreign language is offered at my child's school. Apparently, there is a Spanish teacher but my child thinks that they only help the Spanish-speaking students. I would love it if my child was offered the opportunity to take another language. She used to have Spanish class at her only school.
38. My daughter had a foriegn (sic) language in her school last year and it was her favorite class! However, this year the school does not have a foreign language OR computer class, and I am very disappointed. I feel both are critical for today's world.
39. I would like them to have consistancy (sic) in language rather than 1 yr French then 1 yr Spanish. I would like them to stay w/one. Also, I would like to see a progressive study-rather than same vocabulary. Would love to see conjugation of any verbs (sic). They are only taught vocabulary.
40. She does not take a forgen (sic) language But (sic) has some knowledge of Spanish from a preschool Spanish teacher.
41. I feel the foreign language program is very important in the elementary school.
42. [Elementary D] just lost its magnet school status. The French program was the first elective to be phased out. My daughter was so upset. To continue her foreign language experience we are actively looking for a tutor. She had a new instructor every semester...there was a great deal of turnover in that position. I believe that the parent/teacher communication would have been better if there was just one consistant (sic) teacher. She really enjoyed the elective.
43. I would love to see some sort of immersion program where a language is taught by teaching a subject matter such as art or science in a foreign language.

44. My son's Spanish class is only 1/2 hour per week. Doesn't seem enough to me, but it's better than nothing. Also, my son (he is 9) insists that I mention that he'd rather take French. (!)

45. Foreign language is important and it doesn't jeopardize children's progress in other subjects. I know people who know four languages. I'm an adult and I'm borrowing books from the library to learn a third language in French and may be later in Spanish.

46. My child has had four different Spanish teachers so far in elementary school - an International Magnet School in Wake County. He would be much more enthusiastic if he would have had a solid, consistent experience. Has a gift for language, but is uninspired. Very unfortunate for a state (and county) with a burgeoning Hispanic population (sic).

47. X- Race: White Ethnicity (sic): European (75% Italian/25% Bisque Culture: Hispanic (born & raised in Panama These are 3 different things. Something should be done to address these differences. Strongly believe in foreign language instruction at all levels.

48. I do not think my 2nd grade son is enrolled in a foreign language class. I know he has learned some Spanish words, but it is not a separate class that I know of. There is a high population of English as a second lang. (sic) students at our school. [Elementary E].

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